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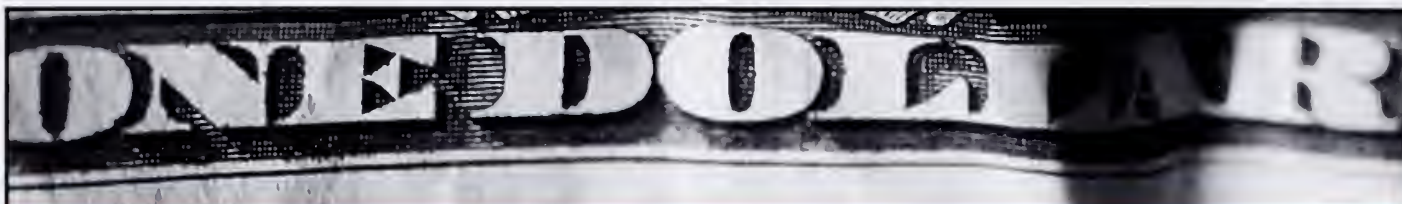
Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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cries of those among us who are the most vulnerable. I've also covered or coordinated countless reports about Illinois officials who use the power that voters entrusted them with to reward those who contribute to their political campaigns.

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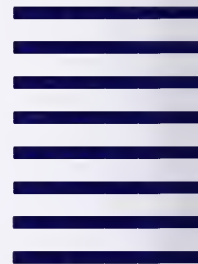
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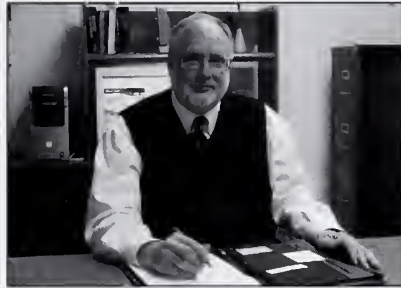
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Illinoisans have a moral responsibility and reason for concern

by Dana Heupel

This month, we report on two issues that should make us ashamed as Illinoisans.

One article illustrates a situation we have a moral obligation to remedy; the other points to a practice that time and again has proved to be irresponsible — and too often criminal.

On page 16, Statehouse bureau chief Bethany Jaeger writes about how human services always end up last in line for state funding, especially during tight budget years. And on page 24, my Q&A with political scientist Kent Redfield focuses on Illinois' anything-goes system of financing election campaigns.

I freely admit strong opinions about the two subjects and that I've had some personal involvement with both. As a Statehouse reporter and editor for the past 10 years, I've written or assigned numerous stories about state government turning a deaf ear to the cries of those among us who are the most vulnerable. I've also covered or coordinated countless reports about Illinois officials who use the power that voters entrusted them with to reward those who contribute to their political campaigns.

One story in the human services area that stands out in my mind was about people whose nursing home costs are covered by Medicaid and who get to keep only \$30 a month for all personal expenses: haircuts, sodas, clothing, shoes — any incidental purchases. That rate, called the "personal needs allowance," was last increased in 1988.

And I spent years working on stories about former Gov. George Ryan's indictment, conviction and imprisonment after it came to light that workers in driver services offices were taking bribes because they were under pressure to contribute to his campaign fund.

Of course, other media outlets and various reform advocates have pointed out the same problems for years, as well.

But little seems to change. That's because politicians don't get their names and photographs in newspapers or on television for responding to the needs of those in nursing homes, or those who are developmentally disabled or mentally ill or victims of domestic violence.

They get publicity for cutting ribbons at new bridges or fire stations or

community centers. They think that's the only way that voters will believe they're doing a good job for their constituents. And, sadly, they may be right.

And serious campaign finance reform hasn't occurred simply because those who make the rules are the same legislators or elected officials who benefit by the current system.

So we blithely go on, year after year, while those who need our help suffer and some of those who hold public office reward their campaign contributors instead of doing what's best for their constituents.

As Jaeger's story points out, the waiting list for developmental disability services contains more than 11,000 names. More than 7,500 people await treatment for alcohol or substance abuse. "Staff are leaving in droves," says the executive director of one community agency, and most agencies across Illinois are in severe financial trouble because the state doesn't pay its bills on time and didn't pay for mandates such as increases in the minimum wage.

The federal government is investigating allegations of civil rights

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violations at developmental centers in Tinley Park in northern Illinois and Anna in the southern part of the state. And a University of Colorado study ranked Illinois 51st among the states and the District of Columbia in supporting people with disabilities in communities with a low number of clients.

The issue of helping the most vulnerable Illinoisans isn't partisan; it's far larger than that. One Democratic lawmaker indicates in Jaeger's story that the state's entire human services support system may collapse if more money isn't found soon.

A Republican argues with her colleagues who say that increasing funding would just be throwing good money after bad because there are so many inefficiencies in the current system. They would believe differently if they knew what's really happening, she says.

Are there abuses of the system? Yes. Is there waste and inefficiency? In selected cases, no doubt. But for anyone to believe, as Gov. Rod Blagojevich indicated in his 2004 budget speech, that for years, "social service providers [have been] getting blank checks, with no questions asked" is ridiculous and uninformed. Yet his administration's policies toward funding for human services in the ensuing four years seem to reflect Blagojevich's demagoguery in that speech.

Social service providers are struggling all across Illinois. I know it from covering them as a newspaper journalist. And in the interest of full disclosure, I know it because my wife is an administrator at one in Springfield. [My then-editors were well aware of that fact, and I didn't write about my wife's agency.] I've heard it discussed at length at her office gatherings, among friends who work at other community agencies and across the dinner table on many, many evenings. Those conversations echoed the serious concerns recounted in Jaeger's story.

Invoking Blagojevich's name above makes a fitting segue into the issue of campaign finance reform. In recent weeks, Ali Ata, a former high-level state administrator, testified in federal

court as part of a plea bargain that the governor promised him a state job after he gave Blagojevich two \$25,000 campaign contributions. A spokeswoman for Blagojevich has repeatedly said the administration does not exchange jobs or favors for campaign contributions.

Nonetheless, allegations about campaign-finance shenanigans have circled around Blagojevich ever since he first took office as a reformer, pledging to clean up state government after Ryan's ethical mess. Although the governor has not been formally charged with any wrongdoing, his administration is under federal investigation of its hiring practices. And after promising to "rock the system" with a campaign reform package, he never pushed for its passage.

As this issue goes to press, the House and Senate have each passed separate bills to increase the personal needs allowance for nursing home residents on Medicaid from \$30 to \$50, using money from the state's court settlement with tobacco companies. That proposal, however, has not been unified under one bill, and it's not clear whether it will make it into a final budget. Nor is it clear how much — if any — new money will be devoted to human services in a final spending plan.

Regarding campaign finance reform, the House already has passed legislation banning those with state contracts worth at least \$50,000 from contributing to the campaigns of constitutional officers who award the contracts. As we go to press, the Senate is scheduled to take up the issue. But even if that "pay-to-play" ban makes it to the governor's desk, he has not indicated whether he would sign it.

If the past is any predictor of the future, when all the legislative heat has cooled this year, human services will once again remain wilted on the vine with too little money to truly help vulnerable Illinoisans. And true campaign finance reform will once again have gone up in smoke.

Let's hope that doesn't happen. Let's hope we're no longer ashamed of our state government. □

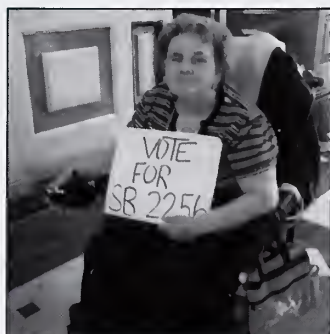
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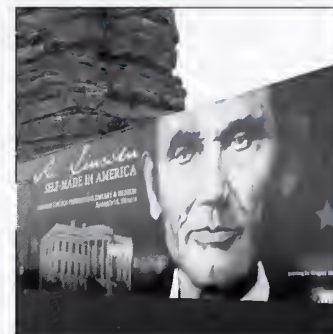
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Bethany Jaeger



Gun control gets the spotlight in an election year, but legislation rarely advances after a vote

by Bethany Jaeger

Twenty-four Chicago Public Schools students died from gun violence in between January and April. That equals the total number killed throughout the entire previous school year.

Chicago legislators passionately urge their peers from across the state to approve stronger gun control measures, but the debate typically triggers emotional responses about such issues as race, culture and, most of all, politics.

While valid, the arguments often are formulaic, the vote usually predictable.

Supporters of gun control, mostly Democrats with some suburban Chicago Republicans as exceptions, argue downstate lawmakers need to understand that guns continue to fall into the wrong hands and contribute to senseless killings of innocent children and young adults.

During an April floor debate about a measure that would limit individuals to buying one gun a month, Democratic Rep. Deborah Graham from Chicago stressed: "We understand that we live in two parts of the state, and I understand that you teach your children how to hunt and handle handguns. We don't have that same opportunity in the city. We face an epidemic that is growing so wildly that we're here asking you for your support."

Opponents, most often Republicans and conservative Democrats from districts outside Chicago, say their city counterparts need to understand that more gun control could violate constitutional

Despite passion expressed by people on both sides of the issue, the polarizing debates often lack widespread willingness to compromise so they can find solutions that would work in such a diverse state.

rights and further burden law-abiding citizens who legally collect guns or use them for sport.

"This is an issue of personal rights," said Rep. Mike Bost, a Murphysboro Republican, in response to Graham during the same floor debate. "The legislature, though well-intended, has already admitted that handguns are already illegal in Chicago. This is not going to change that. All it does is infringe on those people I represent."

Despite passion expressed by people on both sides of the issue, the polarizing debates often lack widespread willingness to compromise so they can find solutions that would work in such a diverse state.

The debate pits north vs. south, rural vs. urban, Republican vs. Democrat. In an election year, candidates and incumbents rally for or against gun control to appease their voter bases.

The Chicago suburbs, however, are a focal point for gun control advocates who believe the regions have potential to swing in favor of their cause.

A March 2007 survey by the Evanston-based Illinois Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence shows strong support for various forms of gun control from voters surveyed in Chicago's eastern suburbs, covering portions of Cook, DuPage, Kane and Will counties.

The campaign, which is a project of the Legal Community Against Violence in California and Illinois, called voters in four state Senate districts that are represented by legislators who typically vote against gun control. The group believes those districts are changing in population trends, says legal director Nina Vinik. The survey picked areas where there might be an upswing in support.

Some questions specifically asked about proposed legislation, including, "Should the state limit the number of handguns an individual can purchase to one handgun per month?" About 55 percent of the 603 respondents indicated strong support, while 18 percent said they strongly opposed and 17 percent said they somewhat supported the idea.

The goal, Vinik says, is to activate the people who indicated support so that they don't just say "yes" to more gun control in a telephone poll, but they actively communicate their support to legislators.

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun

Violence takes it a step further. The national gun control advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., gets involved in elections and uses public pressure in hopes of swaying candidates or incumbents to support gun control. For instance, the campaign mailed postcards last month to the Lake County district of Rep. Sandy Cole, a Grayslake Republican, with a picture of a gun and a target imposed over a group of children. The message said, "Your state representative, Sandy Cole, voted against background checks on all handgun sales [**HB 758**]," and then included Cole's office phone number.

The measure would require background checks for all private handgun sales. Currently, when a person buys a gun at a licensed dealer, the transaction automatically triggers a background check. But if an individual with a firearm owner's identification card buys a gun from another private citizen who holds a FOID card, no check is required. The legislation would mandate the two individuals to go to a licensed dealer so that the transaction triggers a background check.

Jennifer Bishop, program director for victims and survivors for the Brady Campaign, says Cole indicated in a questionnaire that she would support such measures and voted for previous efforts, but then she voted against the proposal this spring.

Cole says she doesn't vote strictly with the National Rifle Association, a major lobbying group that supports gun rights and is active in political campaigns. Nor does she vote strictly in line with the Brady Campaign issues. She says she voted against background checks for private handgun sales because it's redundant; people who have FOID cards, which is required for any legal sale, already have gone through background checks.

The Brady Campaign disagrees, saying state law only requires a background check every 10 years, which changed from five years on June 1. That leaves plenty of time for gun owners to do something illegal that would revoke their cards, Bishop says.

She adds that the group narrowed its campaign efforts to about 10 legislators who represent districts where voters indicated support for such gun control measures. "[Cole] and others may not

Lawmakers have a plethora of reports to consider. While none provides a sole solution, they all offer food for thought beyond formulaic and political arguments so often used.

have really looked into it. They may not have really understood that this is something for which there is significant, widespread, high-profile support."

Cole says after her constituents understand the laws already on the books, they want those enforced before adding new ones. She adds that the Brady Campaign is only targeting Republicans, many in the Chicago suburbs, who voted against this measure. But it's not mentioning more than a dozen Democrats, who all represent districts south of Cook County, who also voted no.

Cole says the politics of an election year creates the hype.

"This bill was just used. They didn't have the votes to pass it. It was used to become the political campaign fodder that it became."

The sponsor, Democratic Rep. Harry Osterman of Chicago, however, has tried for two years to advance the measure, which narrowly failed in the House twice last year and again this year, with 58 voting yes and 58 voting no. It needs 60 to pass to the other chamber.

The votes were so close for the one-gun-a-month and for the background checks proposals that they might come back before year's end, but they would need a higher number of votes to pass.

Lawmakers also are considering other gun control measures, including one that would ban semi-automatic weapons [**HB 4357**]. It stalled in the House this year and in the Senate last year.

The House approved a measure that would punish parents or adults who own guns and fail to prevent their children who have a history of violence from gaining access. **HB 5191** awaited Senate action as of mid-May.

A House committee rejected a separate measure that would have laser-encoded ammunition to help investigate crimes [**HB 4259**] after officials from an East

Alton ammunition plant said they would have to close it and relocate 1,700 jobs out of state.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich also introduced a statewide effort to reduce teen violence by investing in community services that help 20,000 teens get jobs and stay active in and out of school. He also would dedicate \$100 million for school construction, yet the funding depends on a capital plan for the entire state. That deal has been tied up with the General Assembly for years, leaving little hope that the money would come through anytime soon.

The effort, called Community Investment Works, is part of a comprehensive approach, says Rebecca Rausch, a governor's spokeswoman. "Kids need economic opportunity, constructive self-esteem building, after-school and community-based programming," she wrote in an e-mail, "and their communities deserve regular infrastructure investment."

The governor, however, cut more than \$6 million from the most recent budget for Operation CeaseFire, a violence prevention project in "hot spots" throughout the state. A study out of Northwestern University in Evanston last month shows that the number of shootings dropped between 16 percent and 34 percent in four Chicago neighborhoods with CeaseFire programs. Many of the positive effects were "immediate and permanent," according to the report.

It did note that overall crime rates dropped in Chicago at the same time researchers evaluated the program.

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley also recently announced \$1.5 million of city funds to offer summer jobs to 1,000 teens from areas with high crime rates. And he urges community groups and law enforcement, as well as parents, to step up and guide children away from gangs.

While gun control debates in Springfield generate numerous votes, news stories and material for political campaigns, they offer little evidence that the legislation in question actually would work.

Lawmakers have a plethora of reports to consider. While none provides a sole solution, they all offer food for thought beyond formulaic and political arguments so often used. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

The Illinois General Assembly is likely to continue business into the summer months. Legislative leaders have had few meetings to negotiate next year's budget. The next fiscal year starts July 1, potentially requiring temporary budgets to ensure that the state continues to operate. That was the case in last year's record overtime session.

Leaders have met about a statewide capital construction plan this spring, although they had little progress to report by the time we went to print.

After the constitutional deadline of May 31, all legislation requires a three-fifths majority in each chamber. Here are a few examples of measures that could advance before the deadline, as well as some that could stall as part of an ongoing budget stalemate.

The exact language in the bills can be found at www.ilga.gov.

Ethics reform

HB 824 The House and Senate have reached a compromise on the "pay-to-play" ethics reform package. The measure would ban contractors with more than \$50,000 in state business from making political contributions to the statewide officeholder in charge of awarding the contract. The measure also would ban family members of the business owner from contributing to the officeholder's political campaign, as well as apply to anyone with a significant share in the business. The proposal, negotiated by more than 20 legislators, waited for Senate approval in mid-May.

Teen wage increase

HB 5141 Teens would earn the same minimum wage as adults under a proposal by Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat. The measure would increase the minimum wage for workers younger than 18 to the adult wage of \$7.75 per hour beginning January 1. Opponents say the

increase would lead employers to hire fewer teens, especially during the summer months. The proposal would allow a 90-day window before employers had to pay the higher wage to newly hired teens. The House approved the measure, but it awaits Senate action.

Foreclosure assistance

HB 4191 The state treasurer would help some Illinoisans protect their homes from foreclosure under a proposal by House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat. The measure establishes a state fund that could be used to secure mortgages of at-risk homeowners who experience a financial hardship because of circumstances beyond their control. The proposal would apply if there was a reasonable chance the homeowner would be able to resume full mortgage payments. The House approved the measure.

All Kids

HB 1533 A Des Plaines Republican has proposed a measure demanding accountability and transparency from the state's All Kids health insurance program. Rep. Rosemary Mulligan's legislation would spur an annual audit of the program and require All Kids to make public the premiums that are paid, as well as other costs. All Kids would also be expected to disclose contracts awarded for administering the program. The measure passed the House 116-0 and is now in the Senate.

Universal health care

HB 311 Illinois would have a single-payer universal health care system under a proposal by Rep. Mary Flowers, a Chicago Democrat. The initiative would create a mandatory statewide insurance program run by the state, which would be financed through a mix of government funding, employee contributions and a payroll tax

on employers. Under the plan, private for-profit ownership of hospitals would not be allowed. The state would purchase those hospitals from investors. The bill is before the full House.

Mandatory overtime

HB 5661 State employees would not be required to work overtime under a bipartisan measure sponsored by Rep. Lisa Dugan, a Bradley Democrat. The effort responds to correctional workers and others being forced to work 16-hour shifts or face disciplinary action. The measure passed the House and has more than 30 sponsors in the Senate but is being held.

Parole violations

HB 2748 Paroled convicts must notify their parole officers within 24 hours if an order of protection has been issued against them, under a measure that won House approval. The proposal directs the Illinois Department of Corrections to issue an arrest warrant for anyone on parole who is the subject of a restraining order. The measure's sponsor, Rep. Constance Howard, a Chicago Democrat, says the legislation is in response to a murder in her district allegedly involving a parolee.

Campus violence

SB 1881 Individuals who make threats of large-scale violence on college campuses would be denied bail while the threat is investigated, under a measure unanimously approved by the Senate. Sponsored by Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat, the proposal would slow down the legal process so threats of campus violence could be properly investigated by police, says Haine. The measure is in response to threats made at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville last year, as well as the mass shootings at Northern Illinois University. The measure is in the House.

Early childhood education

HB 5038 The state would dedicate more money to education programs for children age 3 and younger, under a measure approved by the House (see *Illinois Issues*, April, page 6). It's now in a Senate committee and has 21 sponsors.

HB 4705 Both chambers have approved an extension of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Preschool for All program, which funds state-sponsored preschool for children from low-income neighborhoods who are considered at risk of academic failure. The two-year extension would allow Illinois to spread funding to children from middle-income families.

Follow the money

HB 4765 Illinois taxpayers would have a one-stop shop to find out how public dollars were spent, under a measure unanimously approved by the House. Rep.

Michael Tryon, a Crystal Lake Republican, sponsored the legislation to improve government transparency by creating a Web site that would track all money spent on such matters as legislative initiatives, state contracts, state employees and tax credits. The measure is stuck in the Senate.

Overdue bills

HB 5898 The House approved a measure that would require the governor's annual budget proposal to include the amount of overdue bills. It also would require the state to pay bills within a month of being submitted and increase the interest rate if the state took more than 60 days to pay the bills. The measure awaits Senate action.

Identity protection

SB 2113 The Senate unanimously approved a measure that would ban state

and local agencies from using Social Security numbers in ways that could expose individuals to identity theft. Sponsored by Sen. Christine Radogno, a Lemont Republican, the measure would, for instance, prevent agencies from printing an individual's Social Security number on any card required to access services, along with other limitations. The House is considering the proposal.

Child predators

SB 2382 The Senate approved a proposal to protect children from Internet sex offenders. Sponsored by Carol Stream Republican Sen. John Millner, the measure creates the offense of knowingly using the Internet to seduce or solicit a child — or a person believed to be a child — to commit any sex offense. It also would establish that a crime is committed when the person travels any distance to meet the minor. The measure is in the House.

Patrick O'Brien

More overtime costs more taxpayer dollars

The General Assembly likely is headed toward another costly overtime session this summer, and taxpayers will be on the hook for the bill while lawmakers continue to haggle over the state budget.

According to the state comptroller's office, taxpayers paid almost \$1 million for legislators to travel to the Capitol for "overtime" sessions last year. Overtime includes sessions convened after the May 31 deadline set in the state Constitution.

The state faces an estimated \$750 million budget gap, and the extra money spent on travel for legislators is more than a drop in the bucket.

Legislators receive \$129 for food and other costs, as well as 48.5 cents a mile for travel, every day the governor calls them back to Springfield for a special session. Last year, they collected per diem for 44 extra days.

Most weeks of the overtime session in July and August last year cost more than \$100,000. Lawmakers didn't agree on a state budget until August, nearly three months after the May 31 deadline. Any

measure voted on after May 31 requires a three-fifths majority, further complicating negotiations.

Because attendance at some of the special sessions fell below double digits, the costs were less than they would have been if the full General Assembly would have come to work.

Fewer than 10 people, far below the number needed to conduct business, attended several sessions. Rep. Gary Hannig, a Litchfield Democrat, says, "A significant percentage of them, there wasn't even a quorum."

At one particularly contentious point last summer, the House convened special sessions by having Hannig drive to the state Capitol to "open" and "close" 10-minute sessions by himself.

"It was a total waste of money. It produced no legislation," he says.

Taxpayers also are paying for a lawsuit the governor filed against the speaker over whether the governor's proclamations can dictate the time legislators must convene. On some occasions, Madigan told his members not to show up because

the governor set sessions at inconvenient times on weekends.

David Dring, spokesman for House Minority Leader Tom Cross, says he expects similar battles between Democratic leaders this year. "It looks like we're headed towards the same silly game between the chambers."

No substantive budget meetings between the four legislative caucuses and the governor had taken place by mid-May, according to Dring and Hannig, a key budget negotiator.

While lawmakers also are far from approving a complex capital plan for road and school construction projects, Hannig says those negotiations may not keep legislators in Springfield this summer. But what would be the need to approve a state budget before the new fiscal year starts July 1.

"It would be nice to pass a capital bill. But the only thing we have to do is pass a state budget. We can walk away from everything else and look at it in the veto session" this fall.

Patrick O'Brien

Illinois continues to fight for FutureGen

The U.S. Department of Energy is expected to decide next month the scope of and the funding opportunities for a series of projects under a revamped FutureGen plan, which could select multiple sites by the end of December. Illinois officials, meanwhile, continue to press the government to retain the original project slated for Mattoon.

The Coles County city was selected last year by the FutureGen Alliance, a group of 13 energy companies, to host a nonprofit, state-of-the-art power plant that would burn coal to generate electricity in ways that would release far fewer pollutants. The goal was to study the integration of three different technologies to determine whether the same model could be replicated by the private sector on a much larger scale. But the federal government scratched the Mattoon project, citing costs that escalated up to \$1.75 billion. The feds then restructured the plan to include multiple sites.

Mattoon could still land one of the projects, but it has to reapply with the rest of the field. If chosen, its site likely

would be on a much smaller scale than originally proposed. And it wouldn't start operating until 2015, three years later than the first plan.

Bud Albright, under secretary of energy at the federal department, says the restructured plan better protects taxpayers and catches up to developments in the private sector. In a teleconference last month, he said that the new plan skips the research step and goes directly to the commercialization of clean coal technologies.

"What we're doing now is going to where we hoped the research would take us, and that is how to make electricity generated at near-zero emissions available on commercial grid," he said.

Phil Gonet, president of the Illinois Coal Association, says that may not be a good thing. "How can you go to something to prove it as being successful until you've tested it? That seems like they're skipping a step that is important."

Advocates for the Mattoon site, including Gov. Rod Blagojevich and the Illinois congressional delegation, maintain that the original plan is physically and legally ready to go and would allow faster development and commercialization of the technologies.

In a letter to U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin last month, Blagojevich said Mattoon remains a viable site. He wrote that a grass-roots group, Coles Together, and the FutureGen Alliance agreed to contribute \$3 million toward the \$6 million cost of securing the FutureGen site. Blagojevich also promised a \$677,000 grant to verify that the geology of the Mattoon site could safely store carbon emissions far beneath the ground.

The FutureGen Alliance also says the restructured approach "falls short."

"If DOE chooses to pursue other projects, they should be complements to, not substitutes for, FutureGen at Mattoon," the organization says on its Web site.

The Department of Energy will supply a fixed amount, \$1.3 billion, offering each plan between \$100 million and \$600 million.

"The industry's going to have to calculate accordingly and not be coming back to the taxpayers saying, 'We need more money, here,'" Albright said. "[We're going to say,] 'This is how much money's available. You tell us what it's going to cost you to get the job done, and stick to it.'"

Bethany Jaeger

ENVIRONMENT

Task force studies take-back and reuse plastic initiatives

The Plastic Bag Recycling Act, which went into effect in January, established the Plastic Bag Recycling Task Force. The multi-organizational group will implement voluntary plastic bag recycling among consumers, retailers and recyclers in a Lake County pilot program, says Rep. Kathleen Ryg, a Democrat from Vernon Hills.

She co-sponsored the legislation with Republican Reps. Sandy Cole of Grayslake and Elizabeth Coulson of Glenview and Sen. Terry Link, a Democrat from Waukegan.

The task force will study the environmental and economic problems associated with petroleum-based plastic bags used in retail. The group aims to reduce citizen demand for the bags and establish take-back processes with retailers. It also will encourage recyclers to accept the bags, which have been hard to recycle in cost-effective ways, says Peter Adrian, recycling coordinator for the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County.

Educating consumers and retailers about the environmental and economic costs associated with used plastic bags is a critical objective. The bags consume large portions of landfills, harm water supplies and wildlife, clog sewers, contribute to urban flooding and bog down recycling processes.

Illinois law, with some exceptions, does not allow plastic composting. If a permit is issued, it is not a cost-effective process, says Adrian. In addition, mandatory bans and recycling are sometimes difficult to enforce and could hurt small businesses. Before taking control measures, legislators and merchants want to spur voluntary and market-based initiatives, he says.

Companies have found a market to convert plastic bags into other goods. Since 1990, Jewel-Osco, a grocery chain with 179 stores in Illinois, has collected and recycled more than 14,200 tons of used plastic bags. The grocer sells the material to Trex Corp., a company that makes outside decking, says Juanita Kocanda, a spokeswoman for Jewel-Osco.

Whole Foods, a specialty food retailer with 15 Illinois stores, and Ikea Home Furnishings, with two Illinois locations, have banned plastic bags entirely. Whole Foods offers only paper bags and gives a 10-cent-per-bag discount to shoppers who bring in their own bags, says company spokeswoman Kate Lowery.

Minneapolis-based Target Corp., which operates 82 stores in Illinois, is one of the participants in the pilot program, Adrian says.

The task force has just formed its board and is "starting to get to work," says Ryg. It must report back to the governor and legislature by 2010 with its findings and recommendations.

Tony Hamelin

NIU leads the Midwest in proton cancer therapy

Patients fighting the hardest-to-treat cancers will have a new option at a university rather than a hospital setting.

Northern Illinois University in DeKalb will house one of only six proton therapy systems in the nation. They treat cancer with precise radiation beams that destroy cancerous cells and preserve healthy cells.

Dr. John Lewis, NIU associate vice president and project director, says as opposed to other types of radiation therapy, “protons release very little energy until they hit the tumor, and they release no energy after the tumor. It all hits the tumor, so you don’t have to worry near as much about surrounding organs.”

That’s particularly good for treatment of childhood cancers, as well as cancers of the brain, neck and prostate that can grow near vital organs.

A groundbreaking is planned this month in DuPage National Technology Park in West Chicago. Slated to open by 2011, the center eventually could treat up to 1,500 patients a year, including those on Medicaid.

The university is partnering with doctors from Northwestern University in Evanston to provide the clinical services.

The site also will partner with the neighboring Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, a premiere site for particle physics research. It helped build the

nation’s first hospital-based proton treatment system in the 1980s, but the equipment was shipped to Loma Linda University Medical Center in California and started serving patients in 1990.

In addition to the Loma Linda site, four other proton therapy systems operate in Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts and Texas. Only about two dozen exist around the world. The Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, which regulates hospital construction projects, rejected a proposal to build another proton therapy center about five miles away from NIU’s site at Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield.

Because the heart of proton therapy is physics, one of NIU’s academic strengths, the ongoing proximity and partnership with the Fermilab is important for consultation, research and further development of the technology, Lewis says.

Other scientists, such as biologists and engineers, also will have new research opportunities. Meanwhile, students will be able to obtain internships in such areas as counseling, nutrition, social work and speech and physical therapy as part of the center’s holistic approach to cancer treatment, says Cheryl Murer, chair of the NIU board and chair of the committee for the proton therapy center.

Total costs are estimated as high as \$160 million. The university plans to issue about \$100 million in bonds. The federal government already has provided \$7.3



Dr. Allan Thornton, medical director for the Midwest Proton Radiotherapy Institute in Bloomington, Ind., is a consultant to the proton therapy project at Northern Illinois University.

million and could line up as much as \$15 million. The university seeks \$20 million from the state, which isn’t guaranteed, given ongoing budget stalemates and slow negotiations for a statewide capital plan.

“We’re going to do the project with or without state investment, but I really think it would be a shame,” Lewis says. “Illinois would not be stepping up to the plate and helping to provide for its citizens the quality of medical care that it could if it didn’t make this investment.”

Bethany Jaeger

COUGAR WATCH

Rare confirmation results from Windy City confrontation

In cat against the city, the cat lost. Last month, a 124-pound, 5-foot 4-inch male cougar wandered into the north side of Chicago and was killed by police responding to several calls from residents.

A DNA sample matched one taken from a January footprint in Rock County, Wis., bordering Illinois north of Rockford. Further genetic testing will determine the Chicago cougar’s source population.

Likely, the cougars that are showing up in the Midwest (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2004, page 23) are animals dispersing from known breeding populations in the West, says Clay Nielsen, assistant scientist with the Cooperative Wildlife Research Lab at Southern

Illinois University Carbondale. Juvenile male cougars commonly leave their natal area.

The closest breeding population to Illinois is in the Black Hills, and Nielsen says it is growing “to such a point where animals that normally would disperse within the Black Hills are running out of space.” He recently completed a survey of wildlife biologists in the nine states between the western breeding populations and the Mississippi River, trying to document potential habitat for cougars. Only 8 percent of the land in that area would be “highly suitable” for the large predators — northeastern Minnesota, the Ozark Mountains in Missouri and the Ouachita Mountains in Arkansas.

Confirmation of cougars in Illinois — such as a carcass, DNA, clear footprint or photo from a trail camera — is rare, but reports of cougar sightings have increased.

“A few of these animals that have shown up in the past 15 years have proven to be captive animals,” says Nielsen. “But that alone does not explain the increase in the number of confirmations we’ve seen.”

The Chicago cougar makes the third confirmed presence of the large cats in the state since the 1860s. The others were near Chester in Randolph County in 2000 and near New Boston in Mercer County in 2004.

Beverley Scobell

HOUSING

Renters working longer to afford a two-bedroom

Advocates for low-income Illinoisans are trying to add hard dollars for affordable housing to a state construction budget. For the first time in Illinois, Gov. Rod Blagojevich included affordable housing — \$100 million a year for three years — in his February capital budget proposal.

The housing crisis, stoked by the growing number of foreclosures, is driving rental prices up and “pushing people with the very lowest incomes, who were barely hanging on to rental housing, back into homelessness,” says Bob Palmer, policy director for Housing Action Illinois.

A minimum wage worker making \$7.50 an hour in Illinois, which is higher than the national average, has to work nearly 90 hours per week, every week, to afford the going rate for a two-bedroom apartment, according to *Out of Reach, 2007-2008*, released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, and Housing Action Illinois.

The groups calculate the Housing Wage for Illinois at \$16.23 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment, a 25.3 percent increase since 2000. The Housing Wage is the hourly wage a family must earn — working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year — to afford a modest space renting for \$844 a month.

Illinois is ranked the 37th least-expensive state for renters, according to a MacArthur Foundation April report. Nationally, the number of delinquent conventional mortgages more than doubled from 2004 to 2007 to more than 1.3 million. In addition, the report points to estimates by the Mortgage Bankers Association that put 12 percent, or some 750,000, subprime loans delinquent.

“We don’t have hard data [for Illinois], but all anecdotal information points to the conclusion that despite the foreclosure crisis and home values going down, things are getting even tighter in the rental market because a lot of former homeowners have re-entered the rental market, creating more competition,” says Palmer.

The MacArthur report found that to be a national trend. After averaging just 0.7 percent annual growth from 2003 to 2006, the number of renter households jumped by 2.8 percent, or nearly one million, in 2007.

Beverley Scobell

Chicago executives: Take care of old business, first

A powerful group of Chicago business executives lacks confidence in the state’s leaders to approve an infrastructure plan by this fall and says the budget for state operating costs faces serious shortfalls.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich proposed a \$25 billion capital program early this year, but funding depends on privatizing the Illinois Lottery for an immediate influx of cash. While legislative leaders have been meeting face to face with two governor-appointed negotiators, former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard, since April, there’s little confidence a plan can be implemented by September as hoped.

Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation, says the lack of details casts doubt over the proposal.

“There is no comprehensive improvement plan. There is a series of projects and lists,” says Msall, who also is a member of the *Illinois Issues* Advisory Board. “You owe it to the public — and the General Assembly should demand — that they know what priorities are before they approve the extraordinary borrowing against the future revenue stream, which is what the lottery is.”

In addition to a state construction budget, the Civic Federation says the governor’s proposed operating budget also fails to address long-term problems. In a 63-page report released last month, the group says because the governor and the General Assembly have not demonstrated a sincere effort to meet the state’s existing obligations — public employee pensions, state retiree health care benefits and Medicaid payments — the group withdraws its support for a state income tax increase. The federation supported the idea last year as a way to generate new money so the state could pay down debt, including \$44 billion in unfunded pension liabilities and an additional \$24 billion in health care liabilities for retired state employees.

“We supported that income tax increase if, and only if, it was tied to reasonable funding of the pensions and addressing pension and health care reform,” Msall says. “That offer was not accepted. And so we are rescinding that offer and urging the General Assembly and the governor to recast this budget in a way that lives within the available revenue.”

The federation recommends such pension reforms as increasing employee

contribution rates, increasing the retirement age to 65 and trimming health care benefits for future employees, as the state mandated the Chicago Transit Authority to do earlier this year.

The Civic Federation continues to support the philosophy that the state should reduce, not increase, operating costs and new spending, which is why it supports the governor’s proposals to cut most agency budgets by 3 percent and to consolidate state agency functions to reduce administrative costs.

Kelley Quinn, spokeswoman for the governor’s budget office, says, “While we’re pleased that the Civic Federation recognizes that we have taken steps to increase government efficiency, their report fails to recognize that there’s a very large human aspect to what government does, especially when there is an economic downturn.”

She cites health care, jobs and quality education as essential services in need despite tough budget times. “We’d like to hear the federation’s ideas about how the state can really help people during the national economic downturn,” she says.

Bethany Jaeger

ECONOMY

Proposed gas sales tax holiday hit a speed bump

State Rep. William "Bill" Black, a Republican from Danville, wants to provide Illinoisans with relief at the pump. A measure he sponsored, **HB 6318**, would suspend 5 percentage points of the current 6.25 percent sales tax on gasoline through September 15. It would not affect the 1.25 percentage points of the sales tax that goes to local governments, nor the 21 cents-per-gallon that supports the Road Fund and other motor fuel use expenses. Illinois is one of three Midwest states that charge sales tax on gasoline.

Black's legislation would save residents an average of at least \$61, based on prices at the time of his proposal. He says a similar measure failed to pass in 2006 because of opposition from Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

"In 2000, we suspended the 5 percent sales tax on gas for about six months, and it saved consumers about \$120 million," says Black. "Even if the gas tax proposal is enacted and costs the state \$250 million in lost tax revenue, who needs it more? My constituents and others I talk with say that they do."

J. Fred Giertz, a professor of economics at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, says economic times are different from 2000, when the economy was strong and the state had a budget surplus. "In 2000, Illinois could afford to absorb the lost gas sales tax revenue. But now, with the recession and current state fiscal deficits, a gas tax holiday would not be the best way to go about it," he says. "The state can't afford it right now."

Oil companies, Giertz says, would benefit the most from a gas tax holiday because it would spur demand that would in turn spur price increases. Giertz says a tax credit or rebate tied to income, not consumption, would bring more economic relief to individuals.

Drivers traveled more than 107 billion vehicle miles on Illinois roads in 2007, with more than 305 million person-miles counted as being by car on an average weekday. That's a 4 percent rise since 2001, according to the Illinois Department of Transportation. Thirty-six of the 102 Illinois counties lack any public transit, and only 19 offer it in urban areas. Last year, when gasoline was \$3.30 per gallon, the state House Republican Motor Fuel Task Force found that the typical Illinois household used 17 gallons a week, at a cost of \$56.

Many families outside the Chicago area commute up to 80 miles a day for work, says Black. "I understand economic supply and demand theory, but it doesn't feed the bulldog today."

Democratic Rep. John Bradley of Marion, a community without public transportation, says the real focus should be on the federal government, which should be going after the oil companies, "much like how the state legislature took on Ameren and Commonwealth Edison last year, to bring consumer relief at a time when 'big oil' makes obscene profits. Consumers and small businesses in Illinois are being conditioned to accept higher gas prices, which is unacceptable," he says.

Sen. Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat, says no proposed gas sales tax relief plan is scheduled in the Senate, citing lack of leadership support. He says a 5 percent gasoline tax holiday could hurt the state budget and that higher gas prices will spur conservation, which in turn will drive down gas prices.

As of mid-May, the average price of regular unleaded gas in Illinois was near \$4 per gallon, and **HB 6318** was stalled in the House.

Tony Hamelin

REGIONAL PLAN

Students share ideas for tackling growth

Talk about forward thinking. For fresh ideas for the future of the state's most-crowded counties, a regional planning group sought out those people who could be sitting in Chicago-area traffic jams in 2040. Now in grades 4 through 12, those future residents and commuters brainstormed about how they want their slice of the world to look when they're the adults.

As part of a public outreach process, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) initiated a pilot program at three schools — Carpenter Elementary in Park Ridge and Pulaski Fine Arts Academy and Whitney Young Magnet High School in Chicago — that asked students for their vision of the year 2040.

"They care strongly about [the future]," says Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of CMAP. "They care about the environment and what's happening in the environment, and their transportation and how it works, and where their jobs are going to be."

Hundreds of students got involved, creating original videos, poems, songs, one-act plays, drawings and three-dimensional models. Some of the best projects were awarded a \$100 prize and are posted on YouTube (see link at www.goto2040.org).

In the fall, Blankenhorn says his organization is beginning another program aimed at finding the next generation of planners. CMAP staff will spend the summer reviewing nominations from teachers to choose 45 students from seven counties for a program called FLIP, Future Leaders in Planning. CMAP will bring the group together over eight months for a series of seminars on the major issues facing the region.

Blankenhorn says the planning agency wants to learn what the high-schoolers think and to encourage them to be leaders who will talk about the issues in their schools and among their friends, and even at home with their parents "to get them thinking about what the future ought to be."

Beverley Scobell



Rep. Randy Ramey, a Carol Stream Republican, greets seniors who traveled from around the state to the Capitol to advocate for Supportive Living Communities, which offer apartment-style living as an alternative to nursing homes. The seniors assembled a 24,000-piece puzzle (in the background) to thank the state for the program.

Seniors support independent living facilities

A group of senior citizens put together a 24,000-piece puzzle to highlight a bright spot on Illinois' innovative "supportive living community" program, which offers apartment-style living with personal services for seniors on Medicaid as an alternative to nursing homes.

They brought the puzzle to the state Capitol last month, when legislators were in the thick of budget hearings about funding such services.

Supportive living programs exemplify the way Illinois can maximize federal Medicaid funds, advocates say. They also serve as an example of shifting state dollars from institutional settings to more community-based settings that cost less.

Barbara Sharff, 90, a resident of one of the centers, Victory Centre of Bartlett, explained the difference between supportive living and assisted living when she visited the Statehouse last month. "In supportive living, you pay for your apartment. And we get three meals a day, except on Sunday when you get a buffet at

noon. But if you're in a supportive living center and your money runs out, the State of Illinois takes over. You're never put out. In assisted living, your money runs out — goodbye."

Supportive living is an innovative state program that uses federal Medicaid dollars to provide seniors with housing within their own communities. They have varying levels of personal assistance for meals, laundry, medications and other services covered by the state's Medicaid program.

Before the program existed, seniors dependent on Medicaid either had to live in a nursing home or stay at home and hire a home health aide, says Brian Cloch, operating principal of Pathway Senior Living LLC based in Des Plaines. This provides seniors a more affordable option for daily services and allows them to maintain their independence.

"It's absolutely the greatest program the state has ever done," Cloch says, adding that it's cheaper for the state, too. "The reimbursement [cost] to the state is 60 percent of the Medicaid nursing home rate. So it's a guaranteed savings."

One thing the supportive living program does not solve, however, is delayed

Medicaid payments from the state, says Wayne Smallwood, executive director of the Affordable Assisted Living Coalition in Springfield.

"We're on a 78-day payment cycle, which means we're behind by two to three months and trying to run a business when you don't know when the next payment's coming. And when there's that much delay, it puts a lot of stress on business operators."

With 95 such communities already operating across the state and 57 more in some stage of development, it's unclear whether the state will continue to shift more money toward community-based services and away from larger institutions.

"We're taking a very hard look and reviewing that to see where appropriate openings may be available," says Barry Maram, director of the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. "People who live in [supportive living communities] have the ability to have some independence. Some people require more institutional care. Some people require less care and go in the community. The key is to find the appropriate settings for different people."

Bethany Jaeger

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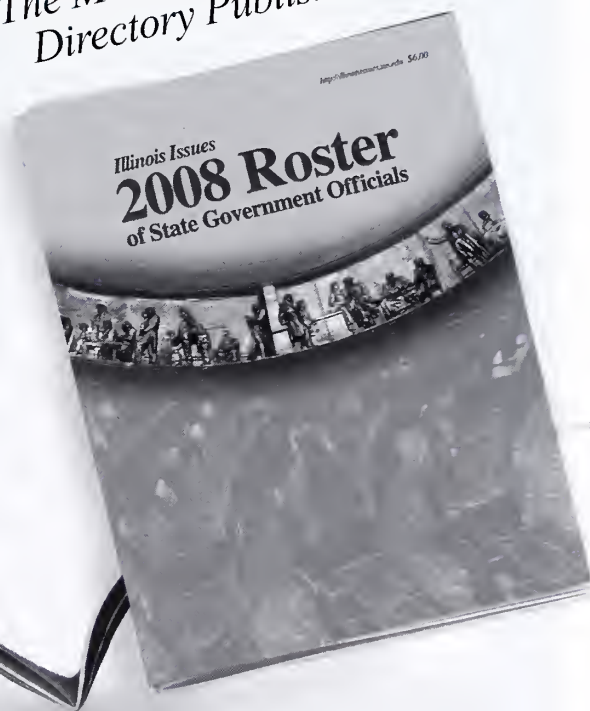
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Last place

Human service advocates hope to elbow their way to the front of the line for new state funding, but they have to compete with other legislative priorities and make systemic changes

by Bethany Jaeger

Amy Hickman, a single mother of two in central Illinois' Jacksonville, lives with multiple sclerosis and is wheelchair-bound after a car accident. She relies on her home health aides to get her out of bed every day.

David and Beverly Pryor of Arcola have a daughter, Mandy, with severe autism. She lives in a CILA, or a community integrated living arrangement, in Charleston. But they want the state to fund more CILAs to help clear a waiting list so other children and adults can have the same opportunity.

James Duncan, a former drug addict in Springfield, says he's sober and able to stay out of prison because he was able to move through a waiting list to access substance abuse treatment.

They all came to the state Capitol — separately — within two days of each other this spring to speak with state legislators, urging them to maintain or increase state funding for services that provide core governmental functions, including education, health care, employment and housing. Legislators also heard hours of testimony from community agencies seeking money for services, but there were so many witnesses that each was limited to speaking three to five minutes.

That same day the witnesses converged at the Capitol, Gov. Rod Blagojevich proclaimed the last week of April as Supportive Living Week to shine a spotlight on a successful program that offers apartment-style living for seniors

on Medicaid, an alternative to nursing homes. But also on that day, another group of advocates brought attention to a dark spot on the state's human services, designating Illinois as "51st and failing" to support community-based services for people with developmental disabilities and mental illnesses.

That sunny April day exemplifies the status of human services in Illinois — there are bright spots, but they're often overshadowed by gloomy blots that challenge the most vulnerable citizens in accessing the wide range of government services they need.

Inside the Capitol, lawmakers' attention this spring is consumed by competing requests for funding education, health care and public infrastructure. Those involved in human services committees agree that there's a dire need to better fund social services, but they also agree that throwing more money into the existing system won't solve the problems.

In the field, community service providers say that while legislators debate ways to bring new revenue into the state, human services aren't part of the discussion about ways to benefit from that money.

A new coalition hopes to change that. The Illinois Human Services Coalition started a grass-roots effort with the hope that a broad range of providers could band together and convince lawmakers that human services as a whole need to be part of the discussions in rebalancing the state's budget priorities.

Leading the all-for-one approach is Don Moss, chair of the new coalition, as well as a Springfield lobbyist for health care associations and executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of Illinois.

"Human services seem to be left waiting outside when the plan comes for how the money is to be spent," he says. "And we don't want to be in competition with education. We just want our place in line when new monies do come down."

Ann Ford, executive director of the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living in Springfield, says in her 25 years of advocacy work in this state, this is the first time so many different providers have joined forces rather than launch individual campaigns to win funding from the same pot of money.

"It's not me going in one minute and talking about disability issues and somebody else coming in behind me talking about a totally different human service issue, and then the legislators have got to decide, 'Well, which one of these do I support?'"

The broad-based approach reflects the nature of the human services system, as individual clients often need multiple services to get back on track. For instance, Ford says she wouldn't support cutting funds for child care any more than she would support cuts for domestic violence programs because her clients often need both while trying to rebuild independence and self-esteem.

"All of these are services that if our state doesn't fund, they're going to go

One problem that gets little attention in the media and in the Capitol includes two federal investigations into state-operated developmental centers for potential civil rights violations.

away. And the result of that is going to be, people are going to hurt. People are going to die. People are going to lose out on opportunities to really have the kinds of lives that they want.”

The new coalition’s effort faces major challenges, however. The grass-roots movement could struggle to compete with well-organized lobbying groups for legislators’ attention.

“It’s become a phrase, ‘It’s a tight year,’ meaning we’re going to fund what we want to fund and whoever gives us the most pressure,” Ford says. “We make a lot of noise, and we’re pretty consistent about being there and being heard. But we aren’t big. We’re not a lobby, as such. We have no money to put into anything political. We just do it with grass-roots advocacy, and that’s what gets overlooked.”

She says all human services are neglected, a situation that is complicated by political and personality battles that distract lawmakers from what’s happening around the state. “It’s absolute lack of importance on the part of the people that make the decisions and pass the budgets.”

One problem that gets little attention in the media and in the Capitol includes two federal investigations into state-operated developmental centers for potential civil rights violations.

William A. Howe Developmental Center in Tinley Park, a Chicago suburb, already was decertified by the federal government in spring 2007 when reports documented such violations as clients being unnecessarily drugged or restrained without medical justification. In one instance, a man was recorded as weighing 120 pounds in April 2006 and just less than 100 pounds six months later. Nurses reported that the scales were always inaccurate. Another resident was found outside of the facility near a busy intersection.

Decertification by the federal government doesn’t mean the facility has to close. It simply means the state no longer receives federal Medicaid matching funds for the institution.

The Illinois Department of Human Services continues to operate and fund Howe Developmental Center, allocating about \$55 million each fiscal year without a federal match.

Lilia Teninty, director of the Division

of Developmental Disabilities within the state human services department, says in the year she’s been working with Howe, the state brought in a new director, hired consultants, retrained staff and revamped clinical and medical standards — not just for Howe, but for all nine state facilities. The state currently does not plan to close Howe, which housed 343 residents in early May.

“Right now our plan is to improve the quality of care for the people who live at Howe,” Teninty says. “We’ve been diligently working towards that effort over the last year. The goal is to improve the quality of care and prepare the center for recertification.”

According to Teninty, the U.S. Department of Justice also is investigating Howe and Choate Developmental and Mental Health Center in Anna in southern Illinois. In mid-May, the state was still waiting for the official findings of those two investigations.

“The fact that they think there is reason to believe that the civil rights of people in our institutional settings are being violated is a concern,” Teninty says. “That is something that is raising the bar and is putting pressure on us, as it should, to improve the quality of care across the system, across all of our state-operated centers.”

As part of another effort, the state is putting more money into services to help clients transition out of the larger institutions into privately owned homes in the community, something advocates nationwide say is the future of services for people with developmental disabilities.

But advocates within Illinois say the effort falls behind all other states.

In fact, Illinois ranks 51st in the nation, including Washington, D.C., for supporting people with disabilities in communities with fewer than six clients, according to a 2008 report out of the University of Colorado’s Department of Psychiatry and Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities. Most of Illinois’ funding still goes to larger state-operated facilities.

Another 2008 report, called *Blueprint*, was commissioned by the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities, an independent state agency that’s federally funded and charged with the mission to

ensure that people with disabilities are part of their communities. The report shows that more than 11,000 people sit on a waiting list for developmental disability services. It also recommends closing five state-run facilities, moving staff to other state jobs and transitioning residents to smaller, community-based settings. The idea is part of a seven-year plan for systemic change and reshuffling of state dollars, with the goal of directing more money to the people who use the system rather than to large institutions.

The idea to close state facilities, however, has vocal opposition from families who fear moving their loved ones and from union-backed workers who fear for their jobs.

Sheila Romano, executive director of the council, says: "Certainly, we need to worry about the workers. They are an important piece of the formula. But we shouldn't be making policy decisions on that first. We should be making the policy decisions on the people who are being served by the policies."

She adds that while the recommendations within the *Blueprint* report are controversial, the state has to stop taking a one-year look at solving a single problem and start looking at ways to solve multiple problems throughout the entire system.

"We don't want to throw more money into a broken system. We need to very much look at how we're improving the system. And the *Blueprint* looks at many comprehensive areas that we need to look at. And we need to look at all of them together, not just look at one in isolation and think that the problem is fixed."

But systemic change carries a \$250 million price tag.

"That is a lot, and we know that," Ford says. "And that's just to get to the national average."



Joyce Newman of Jacksonville holds a sign supporting Senate Bill 2256, seeking funding to help children with developmental disabilities receive an education that's not segregated from the rest of the students. She also advocates for affordable housing and wheelchair accessible facilities.

Illinois Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson of Greenville says the state could have saved \$165 million just by closing Howe when it was decertified, and it would have improved patients' safety.

Benjamin Wolf, associate legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, also believes the state should close Howe. "It's fiscal madness for the state to keep these places open that violate standards and don't get a federal Medicaid match because they're so bad."

The civil rights advocacy group has filed multiple lawsuits alleging that the state is denying civil rights by failing to help individuals transition to smaller, community-based settings. But it has not initiated a lawsuit specifically to close Howe — yet.

"We think the state should close Howe, and I suppose eventually we'll

probably have to deal with that in litigation if the state won't," Wolf says.

Persuading lawmakers

to put money into human services also faces a challenge because legislators and agency officials have a hard time wrapping their arms around the cosmic size of human services.

The two state agencies that administer related programs — the Department of Human Services and the Department of Healthcare and Family Services — consume about 46 percent of the state budget, or nearly \$23 billion.

Rep. Patricia Bellock, a Hinsdale Republican who serves on the House Human Services Committee, says some legislators ask why they should give human services more money when it gets so much money already and when state officials have little ability to track efficiency.

"I think that a lot of people feel that way, but they don't sit through the meetings," she says.

The human services committees in both chambers listen to agencies testify about food stamps for low-income families, unemployment insurance for people who lose their jobs, home health aides for people with disabilities, drug and alcohol treatment for recovering addicts, therapy and housing for people with mental illnesses and shelter and child care for victims of domestic violence. The list goes on.

And each service has a complex and different funding source, often shaping the way the state uses the money and the way clients access the services.

For instance, the state administers Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF, with a federal grant from the Medicaid program. But it's a fixed amount regardless of whether the caseload increases. The money also goes into the state's general fund, which allows state officials to spend the money on anything from job training to energy

assistance or child care.

Federal funds for alcohol and substance abuse treatment, on the other hand, come with a lot more strings attached. All of the federal reimbursement money must go toward treatment. The state has spent about \$86.6 million during each of the last three years.

Advocates say that's not enough, pointing to a 2008 study that says the waiting list for assessments or treatment increased from 6,400 in 2006 to 7,540 in 2007.

Conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago, the study was funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse and commissioned by the Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association.

Duncan, a former drug addict and current client at Gateway Foundation in Springfield, said in a Statehouse news conference last month that when he was last released from jail in 2007, he relapsed and tried to find help. But every place he called said it would be up to three months for him to receive outpatient treatment.

"I needed it right now, immediately," Duncan said, "because I had started to use again, and I knew that was just going to cause the problem of me going back to the Department of Corrections for either the use of drugs or the possession of drugs or an illegal activity to obtain those drugs."

Keith Kuhn, community director at Gateway Foundation in Springfield, said at the same news conference that the facility has 46 beds available for residential programs, but it only has enough funding to fill 38 of them.

"So we're not even able to maximize the use of the existing capacity, let alone

add additional capacity," he said.

He said any new funding would go directly to treatment rather than to startup costs because the beds and the chairs for outpatient services already are available, just unused.

Another challenge is recruiting enough staff to work and to stay.

Haymarket Center, an alcohol and drug treatment center in Chicago, lost 25 percent more staff members this year than last year, said the vice president, Anthony Cole, at the same news conference.

"Staff are leaving this field in droves and droves. So we have difficulty in even trying to hire staff."

Entry-level applicants with a college degree would get paid \$25,000, which Cole said leads community agencies to hire people with less and less experience.

The state did mandate an increase in minimum wage last year to \$7.50, but Cole said the state didn't increase the agency's funding to cover that mandate. In fact, it hasn't gotten an increase in state funding for five years, further pinching his agency from hiring staff, maintaining services and paying utility bills, he said.

Some service providers don't care how the state gets the money, just that

have alternative options.

One strategy is to capture more federal funds available for human services. Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg, an Evanston Democrat, places hope in a so-called hospital assessment program. In the current program that expires this month, hospitals pay a tax to the state. Then the state gets \$3.6 billion in federal reimbursements over three years. Much of the money goes to hospitals that primarily care for uninsured and Medicaid patients. But money left over has funded services for people with developmental disabilities and mental illnesses.

Schoenberg said last month that he would like to use the next hospital assessment program, which the state has to approve and then apply for federal approval, for drug and alcohol addiction services.

"This is a very proactive investment because it will keep people out of emergency rooms, where the health care tends to be the most expensive for all of us."

The absence of new state revenue or federal funds, Schoenberg adds, would probably lead to a collapse of much of the state's health care and human service infrastructure. □



Janet Stover, executive director of the Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities in Springfield, joins state legislators to announce that Illinois is "51st and Failing" in supporting community-based services for people with disabilities. Also pictured, from left, are Sen. A.J. Wilhelmi, a Joliet Democrat, Sen. Rep. Elizabeth Hernandez, a Cicero Democrat, Rep. Kathleen Ryg, a Vernon Hills Democrat, and Rep. Patti Bellock, a Hinsdale Republican.

human services are part of the discussions when it comes time to dole it out.

But given the ongoing political stalemates among the state's legislative leaders and the governor, lawmakers' ability to compromise on ways to bring in the amount of cash needed to fund education, health care and construction needs remains to be seen.

In the meantime, community service providers and state lawmakers do

A thriving press

While mainstream media suffer from dwindling circulation, ethnic publications in Illinois are growing

by Robin Huiras

As owner and publisher of a print media enterprise, Zeke Montes reviews daily reports on circulation, ad sales and company growth. They're ominous numbers for most media executives, foretelling industrywide change that includes cutbacks, layoffs and mergers.

But Montes, a self-starter with no formal journalism training who began publishing the infotainment guide *Teleguía de Chicago* out of the second story of a Berwyn home 23 years ago, isn't like most media types.

For starters, his numbers — in circulation and revenue — are up. It's a decades-long escalation that has allowed Montes, who is of Mexican descent, to diversify his business by publishing Cicero's Spanish-language newspaper *El Imparcial* and the regional Spanish-language phonebook *Guí Telefónica*. Both *Teleguía de Chicago* and *El Imparcial* have risen in circulation to 36,000 and 20,000, respectively, from 15,000. Revenue from his business, Teleguía Inc., has grown from about \$500,000 10 years ago to nearly \$2 million today.

Montes' success contradicts the current trends at mainstream publications, where revenue and circulation numbers are down. But Montes is far from alone in his success.

Throughout Illinois, hundreds of ethnic and ethnic-language print, radio and broadcast outlets are experiencing significant growth. Further, they show no signs of slowing down.

"Every time a new ethnic community or neighborhood is born across the country, there is a need for a means to information, so you will always have a growth in the small community newspapers that service those neighborhoods — I think this is going to be an endless growth," says Montes, who is also vice president for marketing for the National Association of Hispanic Publishers.

Illinois Spanish-language publications alone number 66, which includes 28 magazines, 18 dailies or weeklies and 20 less-than-weeklies, and have a combined circulation of nearly 1.7 million, according to the Latino Print Network, a California-based research firm that studies trends in the Hispanic printing industry.

Seventeen other ethnic groups, among them African American, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Greek, Polish, Pakistani and Russian, print or broadcast in more than 13 other languages, according to Columbia College Chicago's Community Media Workshop.

Since November the group has been surveying ethnic and ethnic-language press institutions for inclusion in its annual Chicago-area minority media guide. So far, more than 120 such outlets have been identified in Cook and its collar counties. By year's end, the group expects to identify at least 180 more, says Gordon Mayer, vice president of the Community Media Workshop.

Kirk Whisler, president of the Latino Print Network, says that his group works

with newspapers in 166 markets in the United States — nearly double the number it worked with in 2000.

"For decades I've been asked when are we going to see a slowing down or stopping of [the growth of the Hispanic press], and I used to think we would see that slow down, but, although it's not quite as fast as the 1900s, it hasn't," Whisler says.

That's in sharp contrast to mainstream media trends, according to Dave Bennett, executive director of the Illinois Press Association.

Bennett says, "The competition for the time and attention of most Americans is very intense, and the whole notion of how the newspaper fits into our society, combined with the reduction in reading and the rise of the Internet, are three factors that have led to a continued erosion of circulation of newspapers."

Without a doubt, immigration and the growth of ethnic-language speakers has shaped ethnic media's growth, but such publications have much greater allure than offering a familiar language.

A 2005 poll commissioned by New California Media found that ethnic media reached more than 51 million adults nationally — a quarter of the U.S. population. Twenty-six million of those individuals turned to ethnic news sources before looking to the mainstream press.

"Conventional, neutral journalism has a tough time appealing to lots of those different audiences, so one of the things we think ethnic journalists have going for

them is they have this organized connection to their audience," Mayer says.

And while providing news, information and advertisements with a specific ethnic angle is not the gold standard for mainstream press, it might just explain why their circulations are dwindling and those of the ethnic press are not.

"We who live in the community have a much better understanding of the community than someone who doesn't speak Spanish or lives somewhere else," Montes says. "There's a very unfortunate trend going on in the industry across the country: Mainstream newspapers have discovered that there's a Spanish community, and many of them have opened newspapers not for the sake of providing great information but to survive and make money. ... If you have a bunch of employees who are only there for the paycheck, the company is [foreign] owned and what drives it is money and sales, it's not benefiting the community."

In Illinois, that type of community-oriented journalism is nearly as old as the press itself. Since ethnic newspapers began flourishing in the mid-1800s, community leaders in Chinese, Filipino, German, Greek, Lithuanian, Polish and several other communities used the press to advance news, ideologies, events and advertisements they felt integral to their brethren.

Perhaps nowhere is this better seen than in the first papers printed by and for Chicago's immigrant Czechoslovakian community, which by 1900 was among the largest in the world. According to Dominic Pacyga, professor of history in the Liberal Education Department at Columbia College Chicago, *Svornost*, advocating a free-thinking, anti-Catholic view, appeared in 1875; the pro-Catholic *Narod* emerged in 1894; and *Denni Hlasatel*, which is still printed today, began promoting a more neutral stance, in 1891.

"A lot of the context in these papers was unfamiliar to Americans, was beyond the bounds of what Americans understood but very important in their various communities," explains Pacyga, who's written several books on Chicago's Czech and Polish communities.

While reporting news of the homeland was — and remains — a vital component of the early ethnic press, the more important function of those publications was acting as a conduit to educate immigrants about politics in their adopted lands.

"For instance, Polish newspapers tried to encourage citizenship and Poles to vote because in Chicago, that's how you got a

"It's imperative in American journalism for there to be a space for an otherwise invisible community to project their voice into the public radar, and this is what ethnic media has always been," says Sandy Close, executive director of New American Media, a California-based national association of more than 2,000 ethnic media sources. "It's a medium that gives visibility and,

Photograph courtesy of the Community Media Workshop



Dou Tagala is a news correspondent for Balitang America, a U.S.-based network for ABS-CBN International in the Philippines.

job right up until the turn of the century," Pacyga says. "If you wanted more Polish police officers, more water department employees, then you'd better elect more Poles because that's how things work in Chicago."

As immigrant populations evolved and English became the language of choice for second and third generations, the ethnic press changed. The Americanization of immigrants causes the disappearance of hyper-niche publications, the appearance of bilingual publishing and alteration of content to meet the needs of their new audience.

"Today you see the immigrant press putting out lots of magazines in delicatessens and groceries that are aimed at the younger population," Pacyga says. "They really reflect the current cultural trends, such as rock and roll, of the younger community."

The ability to consistently change to meet the needs and express the views of the community has allowed ethnic media to retain relevance in the face of mainstream domination.

therefore, credibility and validation to a community that would otherwise not show up in the society pages of more mainstream newspapers — and if you're not visible in the media culture, you don't exist, you don't belong."

In Illinois, it is easier than ever for people of different ethnicities to find media that mirrors their cultural, social and political inclinations.

The ethnic-owned radio and broadcast stations in Illinois number far fewer than print outlets — only two minority-owned television stations, both of which are located out of state, and 10 radio stations, three of which are located out of state, serve Illinoisans. But when those local outlets are combined with national stations, such as Univision and Telemundo, ethnic-owned affiliates and white-owned stations that produce ethnic subject matter, the number of institutions producing ethnic material is nearly incalculable.

Whether Hispanic infotainment guide, Korean television station or African-

American talk radio, ethnic media ascribe to some of the same principles.

Those begin with understanding that the growing ethnic masses are educated and need quality information, says Scott Bae, vice president for operations at KBC-TV, an analog station that broadcasts 24 hours of primarily Korean-oriented programming throughout Illinois on WOCH-CA Channel 41. About 50,000 viewers tune into Channel 41, which is among six television affiliates and three radio stations the Bae family business, KM Communications, owns in Illinois.

"It's not the old cliché that we're just in Chinatown — there are large Asian populations all over the city and state — and as we grow and expand, the more we seek access to information," Bae says. "Ethnic media are a tool to access information that mainstream media may not be able to fully give a dedicated amount of time and effort. We provide local and world news, covering in great detail events and situations that may affect us. Because we're able to do things [mainstream media] are not, we've been able to thrive."

But expanding on information typically glossed over by traditional media is just the first tenet ethnic media pursue in building a strong connection to their audience.

It's a principle Melody Spann-Cooper, president of Chicago's only African-American owned radio station, WVON 1450AM, a subsidiary of Midway Broadcasting Corp., grew up watching alongside her father in the studio.

Originating in 1963 as a radical sound called "The Voice of the Negro," the station has evolved into a socially conscious, forward-thinking talk format with the slogan "The Voice of the Nation." Throughout the station's 45-year history, listeners have known they're tuning into a place that projects the African-American perspective, Spann-Cooper says.

"When I describe WVON, I say, 'If you really want to find out what's happening in the African-American community, all you need to do is turn on WVON,'" Spann-Cooper says. "If there's an issue being discussed and you want to get a gauge on what the African-American community is thinking about it, then this is your station — because this is our station, and no one can do it better than we can."

Spann-Cooper says that the diversity,

vibrancy and prosperity of the state's African-American community allows for the station's success — it reaches about 250,000 listeners each week.

"I think the station resonates with people because it's more reflective of where we are as an African-American people today," she says. "It reflects the prosperous business community and intellectual community. We push education and show the bright side of our community because too often you don't see that in the general marketplace."

Hand-in-hand with providing an ethnic perspective is ethnic media's role as an advocate.

Many owners of ethnic media say their advertisers ... supply much more than revenue: They provide a pulse on the audience.

When governmental policies or social programs adversely affect the African-American community, the five papers in the Chicago Citizen Newspaper Group, which have a combined circulation of about 125,000, speak out, says publisher and CEO Bill Garth.

"We're the eyes and ears of the black community — we listen to them and we serve them," Garth says. "If you mistreat people, you're in trouble with us no matter if you're my advertiser or my friend."

Although Garth's newspapers, like most African-American publications in the city, share some of the mainstream media's problems with dwindling circulations and flagging ad revenues, the 40-plus-year newspaper veteran is confident of his company's future, which he is placing in the hands of his children.

"I think there's always going to be a need for the black press, just like there's a need for the Jewish press and Chinese press — we're all ethnic groups and no one knows about all of these ethnic groups but the groups themselves," he says. "And because of the special service I render, I have a better chance of surviving in the long term."

That specialized nature gives ethnic media an edge for enduring success, industry experts agree.

"By and large these are not media driven by profit motive but a commitment to the community, and that may sound like a goody-goody abstract, but it is seen over and over again as children take over the business for their parents," says Close of New American Media. "There is an esprit de corps that they know very clearly the service they are providing. And because their role is so irreplaceable for their audiences, they're not going through this identity crisis."

Further shielding ethnic media outlets is the largely uninterrupted receipt of revenue.

"Print dailies and weeklies in the ethnic sector continue to have an increase in advertising because advertisers realize this is the only way reach these niche markets — there's no alternative," Close says. "For instance, major utilities don't advertise in the print press, but when it comes to ethnic media, they don't have a choice because 70 percent of this media has not yet gone online."

Indeed, many owners of ethnic media say their advertisers — the majority of whom are local — supply much more than revenue: They provide a pulse on the audience.

No one knows this better than Montes, whose relationship with advertisers has fueled the growth of his business into a company with top-of-the-line offices in Cicero and several dozen employees.

"If you live and work in the community and are involved in the day-to-day business of your clients, whether it's a travel agent or grocery store, you are living and bleeding what is going on in the community," Montes says. "My first mission is to community and then to my advertisers, and we work very hard on a block-by-block basis to make sure we're doing the right things."

It's a honed business model — a grass-roots effort to connect with the community combined with advertising appeal based on this niche market — that epitomizes the entire industry.

Montes says, "The small, family-owned community press plays a big role in having and keeping the freedom of the press that we enjoy today." □

Robin Huiras is an Evergreen Park-based free-lance writer.

Q&A Question & Answer

Kent Redfield

In the past decade, Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield, has become widely known because broadcast and print reporters across Illinois, and occasionally the nation, sought out his wisdom as a political pundit — especially when Sen. Barack Obama mounted his presidential bid.

But long before then, Redfield's studies into how campaign contributions affect public policy in the state made him an invaluable resource to insiders and a voice for reform of the no-holds-barred Illinois system, where anybody can contribute any amount to any candidate.

Redfield, who will be 60 in July, will retire from the university on August 31 after 29 years, but he still plans to continue his research into campaign finances as director of the Sunshine Project, which focuses on the role of money in politics.

He grew up in Utah and earned a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Utah, where he met his wife, Janet. After he obtained his doctorate degree in political science from the University of Washington in Seattle, he worked for a behavioral science research group at the university's medical school. Then a friend who was chief of staff for Illinois House Speaker William Redmond, a Democrat, offered him a job as a committee staffer in Springfield.

"That was quite an education; it really was," Redfield says about his 4 and a half years working for the General Assembly. In 1979, when the chance arose to teach and run the legislative intern program at then-Sangamon State University, he left politics for academia, where he has applied his real-world political experience to his research at what is now UIS.

He consented to an interview with Illinois Issues executive editor Dana Heupel in mid-April. Here is an edited and excerpted transcript of that conversation.



Kent Redfield

Q. How did you initially become interested in politics and political science?

As a freshman, I was a chemistry major, and I really enjoyed going to college the first semester away from home. And frankly, the only class that I really enjoyed or did well in was a political science class. I had a couple of really interesting instructors, and that kind of piqued my interest. ...

I got the bug from some teachers and some classes when I was a freshman and then hooked up with two very different but very influential people in terms of my life as far as within the political science department at the University of Utah. I mean, a guy that was a behavioral scientist who was into sociology and psychology and social psychology in relation to politics, that was really exciting stuff, and then a legendary guy who was a [constitutional] law person, who I got a couple of A's out of his con

law class. The thing I'm most proud of anything I've ever done was to be able to get A's out of this guy. So it was challenging; it was interesting.

Q. You've made Illinois campaign finance a specialty in your work with the Sunshine Project, the university and other areas. What drew you to delve deeply into how politicians raise and spend money?

Initially, it had to do with the fact that there was data there that no one had looked at. It was on microfiche; it was not readily accessible. So it was in an area [ripe for research] if you're a political scientist and you're interested in elections and state government and those sorts of things, and campaigns are interesting and campaign finance is interesting.

But in Illinois, there was a challenge — but also obviously a reward — from

getting involved with data and information that literally no one had. And so I started working on it and building databases. ... But what else makes it interesting in terms of studying campaign finance in Illinois is that it is so wide open. ...

It's interesting in terms of both the role that money plays, but it's also interesting as a political scientist because you know that whatever people are doing, they're doing it because it makes sense to them politically. They're not doing it to get around some kind of contribution limit or some kind of restriction in the law. It's really kind of pure behavior. But it's also fascinating behavior because the campaign finance system both reflects and reinforces Illinois' political culture, which is a very wide-open, power-money, winning-losing, very partisan kind of politics.

And so it's not surprising that we have the kind of campaign finance system that we have, or that money plays the role that it does. And ... eventually, it made it part of ... what my interests are in terms of advocating change, in getting involved with advocacy groups, because I really do see the abuses and the excesses from the research that I do.

Q. After analyzing state campaign finance over all these years, what broad conclusions can you draw?

I think clearly that a pure sunshine system, where all you have is disclosure — reporting and disclosure — is not sufficient. I mean, it's necessary — you have to have that. But I think that if you want to know what the federal system would look like if we just got rid of all the rules and regulations, it would look a lot like Illinois.

I mean, we've had a 20-year experiment in what role does money play in politics if you have no restrictions, and I don't think that it's positive. And so I think that Illinois is kind of, you know, a prima-facie case that you need to have some kind of regulation and control on the flow of money into politics or you really do distort the pattern, you distort the process. ... You're never really going to level the playing field, but Illinois really does allow people with money to maximize the use of that resource.

Q. Do you think real campaign finance reform is an achievable goal in Illinois?

Oh, sure. I mean, I am always pessimistic short term and optimistic long term. When I started ... we were getting microfiche from the State Board of Elections, we're filling out a form that we had to put down our name, occupation, employer, address, the reason you wanted to look at it, a phone number. And then a copy of that went to whoever's report you were looking at.

So I want to look at [House Speaker] Mike Madigan's campaign finance report, he got a piece of paper saying Kent Redfield came and looked at your report. ...

People could spend anything they want, and so there was no ban on personal use. We have gotten to the point where we've got some modest regulations, we've got really good electronic disclosure, we've got ban of personal use, we're having a discussion about campaign finance reform.

We may or may not get a pay-to-play bill, a restriction on people with state contracts contributing, but I think over time, when you put it out there and actually get people to engage it, then I think the case is compelling, and it's hard to vote against. It's just always difficult to get it out there so people can vote on it. But the system presents opportunities.

Whenever there's a huge scandal, that's always an opportunity to go in and try and get some change. ... If you can achieve something meaningful, move it a little further down, then that's a good thing. So I think this is doable long term, but I think that you're talking about changing the culture. It's not just changing the law; it's changing the culture.

Q. The Democrats in the Illinois House and Senate and the governor's office can't agree on an agenda. What do you think they need to do to reach at least a compromise consensus so they can govern effectively?

This is a huge leadership problem and a personality problem that — I mean,

this is irreconcilable differences, and unfortunately, there's no way that the Democratic leadership and the governor can file for divorce. And so I think at some point, someone's going to win or someone's going to leave. We're not going to reason together and get a compromise at this point.

I don't know whether that means [Senate President] Emil Jones abandons the governor, I don't know that means the governor just eventually leaves office under some circumstances. I can't imagine the speaker doing anything different from what he's been doing. I mean we have to have a budget — eventually we'll leverage a budget to get us through this year — but ... I'm not looking for a renaissance in terms of these people.

On the other hand, I don't think that a constitutional convention or recall is going to fix things. I don't think you solve leadership problems with structural changes. ...

You know, a recall is an election — we've not been doing real well with elections as is. Thirty-seven percent of the eligible voters participated in the gubernatorial election. I've said this before, but a lot of people are complaining about an election they apparently skipped, as far as what happened in 2006. ... I'm at a loss, and the people I talk to who have been looking at this as long as I have and have much more of an insider perspective than I do are at a loss as to what's the solution to this.

Q. You talked about the governor. According to various polls, he's one of the most unpopular governors in state history. Do you think he can win re-election if he wants to, or regain the trust of the citizenry during this term?

I don't see him rising in popularity. The question is, will he, for whatever reason, become basically unelectable, which was what everybody knew by the time you got to the spring of [former Gov.] George Ryan's last [term] — or actually the fall, when he was having to file for primary of his third year — that he was unelectable, that there was no

way that he was going to win office again. And so [Gov. Rod Blagojevich], because of corruption or allegations and/or convictions, indictments, or because of just total deterioration of state government, could become unelectable.

Now, elections are always relational. It's not how good a candidate is Rod Blagojevich, it's how good a candidate is Rod Blagojevich compared to whom he's running against. ... I think it's highly unlikely, but I can imagine a scenario where he gets re-elected.

I think it's going to be more difficult for him to raise money, given the patterns of the last couple of reports, because about 50 cents of every dollar that someone gave him in the last six months — I think it's six months; at least the last report — half of it went to legal fees to Winston & Strawn.

And that makes it more difficult to raise money if people believe that you're actually paying the legal fees and stuff. But the governor and his team have been the best we have ever seen at using the office of the governor to raise money. But all the money in the world won't help you if you are essentially unelectable.

Q. *Given the federal investigations into his administration, and some of the side investigations that are going on into some of his advisers, do you think Gov. Blagojevich will be indicted?*

I think that is clearly the federal prosecutor's intention. ... You can look at the pattern of prosecutions, the way they've structured immunity deals and prosecutions. That only makes sense if their target is the governor. Now, it will depend on whether or not the federal prosecutor keeps winning. If Tony Rezko is not convicted, that puts a big hole in that particular avenue. [This interview was conducted — and this edition of *Illinois Issues* was published — before the Rezko trial concluded.] ... So if I had to just guess, I would say yes ... that one of these investigations would lead to his doorstep, that there will be an indictment.

... So I would be nervous if I were the governor, given where the prosecutor's heading, but this can fall apart.

Q. *The Republicans in the state can't seem to mount a serious challenge in the legislative or statewide races. Why is that, and what do they need to do to light a fire?*

It's a failure of leadership, and it is changing demographics. It is clear that the Republican coalition that had involved moderate to conservative people running for office — [Gov. Jim] Edgar, [Gov. James] Thompson, even [unsuccessful candidate Attorney General] Jim Ryan — has really fallen apart in terms of the fights between the hard-right conservatives and what's been the more moderate, often suburban kind of Republican. ... You've seen problems in county organizations and fights over ideology in terms of who's a real Republican and who isn't a real Republican, and you combine that with the demographics, and it's very difficult for Republicans. ...

Everyone was surprised with the 2000 census for a couple of reasons: One, the city, Chicago, kind of stabilized, and it's even more Democratic than it's ever been.

The suburbs have become more Democratic as you've got the out-migration in terms of suburban Cook, and then not only have you had out-migration in terms of the collar counties, but this growth in the Hispanic populations in the collar counties has been pretty dramatic. ...

Downstate is becoming more Republican. ... The old conservative southern Illinois Democrat is becoming more of a conservative southern Illinois Republican, but their numbers have dropped. ... And so I just think the demographics are working against the Republicans. ... They have had terrible candidates and a terrible leadership and have had terrible fights. And even if they didn't have any of those things, they would still have problems because of the demographics — both the population demographics and the political demographics.

Q. *How do you see this year's presidential race taking shape?*

If I were betting today, I would bet that Barack Obama is going to win the Democratic nomination and that he will get elected president by a very small Electoral College majority and maybe a little safer popular vote.

I think that his race hurts him more than Hillary Clinton's gender in a general election. And so is he going to lose some parts of the traditional Democratic coalition because of race? That's going to be a huge issue.

On the other hand, assuming that we have an unpopular war, \$4-a-gallon gas and we're going to be in the middle of — pick your quarter — of a moderate recession, then voters [will be] looking for a change. ...

I think it's Obama's characterization that John McCain is running for George Bush's third term. It's always problematic for someone. I mean, it would be worse if McCain were Bush's vice president, but even as just the Republican nominee with an unpopular president, with a bad economy, with an unpopular war, that ought to be a slam dunk for the Democrats.

Q. *Now that you're cutting back your workload at the university, how do you expect to spend your time after August 31?*

My grant has been renewed for 2008-2009. I'm going to continue to do campaign finance research. I'm going to work more with the advocacy groups that I work with, both in terms of Illinois and with some initiatives in terms of political reform in the Midwest. I'm going to do more writing, both academic and popular-audience kinds of writing that I just haven't had an opportunity to do, or I haven't taken the opportunity to do. ...

And I'm going to play a lot more golf. I kiddingly tell people that my goals are to save the world and break 90, and that I have a better shot at the first goal than the second. But I'm optimistic. ... I will teach in the spring, I'll probably teach a class this semester. It's just a different stage of my university career. □

Lincoln's example

The virtues of the Great Emancipator would provide a good framework for today's candidates to follow

by Joseph R. Forniери



By all accounts, this has been a historic election season, one that has engaged the passions of the American people.

The Republican contest witnessed a doomed candidate “come back from the dead” to clinch the nomination. The continuing Democratic contest pits an African-American candidate against a former first lady and a female candidate. The twists and turns of that spirited race have brought to the surface internal divisions over race, ethnicity, age, class and religion.

Will the contest be resolved before the convention in August? America awaits the dramatic verdict of the superdelegates. The war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the war on terror, the health care crisis, the slumping economy, the tumbling housing market, the outsourcing of jobs, cultural and educational decline, real and perceived inequalities of all sorts, escalating gas and food prices and the dilemmas posed by illegal immigration are just some of the difficult issues we

face. Which candidate best personifies the qualities of intellect and character required to confront these challenges successfully?

In deciding this November, the people of Illinois may wish to consult the example of their favorite son, their land's namesake. It should be remembered that Abraham Lincoln's greatness as a leader sprang from his character. Indeed, the same statesmanlike qualities required to lead us through today's challenges will likewise depend upon the character or virtue of the leader we choose in November. The sex scandal surrounding former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer is a cautionary tale of how moral failing can discredit leadership, betray public trust and undermine the rule of law.

Can we really judge the present in terms of the past? Some historians sneer at the effort to do so. They have even invented a derogatory term — “presentism” — to stigmatize such attempts, which they regard as the crass exploitation of history for partisan

purposes. Perhaps they don't realize that their own unwillingness to apply the lessons of the past to the present reduces their profession to nothing more than a hobby for leisured intellectuals.

The concern about partisan exploitation of the past is valid; however, if it is taken too far, it would deprive our present generation of crucial guidance and inspiration, thereby imprisoning us in the flux of the moment. The appeal to epic leaders like Lincoln from the past to help guide us in the present is not only inevitable but salutary when it furthers public dialogue and is supported with reasoned argument.

Contrary to academic fear of presentism, Lincoln believed that history provided enduring lessons about human nature, which remained essentially the same throughout time and place. What he said of his election in 1864 applies equally to our election of 2008.

Human-nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good. Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged.

With this timeless advice in mind, it is worth considering the qualities of intellect and character that made

Lincoln a great leader so that we can ascertain their presence or absence in today's presidential candidates. Following is a list of some of the virtues — that is, the moral and mental traits — embodied by Lincoln the statesman. This list is by no means exhaustive; it merely provides a framework for further civic reflection.

• **Moral Clarity.** Mere politicians make an art of being “all things to all people,” while great statesmen hold tight to core convictions and do not waiver in their defense. When it came to fundamental issues about the inherent moral goodness or evil of slavery, Lincoln was forthright and uncompromising. For example, he condemned popular sov-

cignty, the policy of giving territorial settlers the freedom of choice to accept or reject slavery, because its moral relativism blurred the line between good and evil. It conveyed the message that the rightness or wrongness of slavery was a matter of popular choice. Thus, at Peoria in 1854, he declared, “I can not but hate” this “*declared* indifference” to

Bicentennial events

Lincoln aficionados all over the country will be able to see some offerings of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, which has created a traveling exhibit to commemorate the bicentennial of the Great Emancipator's February 9, 1809, birth.

The exhibit, named “Abraham Lincoln: Self-Made in America” began its visits with an April stop at a Denver history museum and will continue to travel to bicentennial events throughout the country until August 2010.

“It's kind of a mini-museum experience,” says Dave Blanchette, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Historic Preservation. “Yet, people who have seen the museum will like this, too, because it's different enough that it's worthy of its own visit.”

Among Illinois' stops are June 27-July 2 at the Taste of Chicago; July 3-6 at the Ribfest in Naperville; and August 7-17 at the State Fair in Springfield. Other appearances will include the Democratic and Republican national conventions, major sporting events and programs at schools and colleges.

The exhibit, which includes graphics, facsimile documents and artifacts, will be contained in a 53-foot-long expandable trailer. Highlights of the exhibit, which is designed to tell the life story of Lincoln, include the presentation of the museum's video “The Civil War in Four Minutes.”

Also, a traveling learning station that mirrors the mobile exhibit themes will be displayed at 40 public libraries and



A 53-foot semi-trailer is touring the states to educate viewers.

historical societies.

Meanwhile, a July 15 deadline is set for participants in a week-long, 360-mile bicycle tour through Lincoln country, which is designed to emulate Lincoln's path from his birth in Hodgenville, Ky., to his boyhood in southern Indiana and adulthood in Springfield. Stops are also planned in such locations as Decatur and Marshall for the August 16-23 bicycle trip, which is dubbed Tour de Lincoln.

In September, the 1828 trip Lincoln took by flatboat from Rockport, Ind., to New Orleans will also be re-enacted. The tour will visit 18 cities and eight states during the 26-day voyage. Illinois stops include Cave-in-Rock, Elizabethtown, Metropolis and Cairo.

Also, the sesquicentennial of the Lincoln-Douglas debates falls in 2008. Starting August 22 in Ottawa and ending October 19 in Alton, on a weekend near the actual events, actors portraying Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas will debate.

“Lincoln” and “Douglas” will also appear at the Old State Capitol in Springfield on June 14-16 and in Bement on July 26. Bement is believed to be the place where Lincoln and Douglas met to arrange final details for the debates.

Lincoln gave the “House Divided” speech in the Old State Capitol on June 16. This speech helped to define the issues central to the seven debates.

Other cities where debates were held include, in chronological order, Freeport, Jonesboro, Charleston, Galesburg and Quincy. □

Staff report

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum



The mini-museum recreates displays, including the 1861 Farewell Address from a train car in Springfield as Lincoln left for the White House.

slavery. "I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself." Four years later in 1858, Lincoln used the "House Divided" metaphor from the Bible to affirm the core antislavery principle of the Republican Party.

'A house divided against itself can not stand.' I believe that this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. It will become all one thing or all the other.

In declaring this, Lincoln wanted to prevent Republicans from making an alliance with Stephen A. Douglas, who had opposed the admission of Kansas to the Union as a slave state. Lincoln reminded his audience that Douglas opposed the admission of Kansas not because he thought slavery was wrong in principle, but because the election process was flawed. Douglas' opposition was therefore on procedural, not moral, grounds. According to Lincoln, there could be no wavering over the abstract question of slavery's good or evil. Which of today's candidates forcefully articulates a clear moral stance on fundamental questions involving right and wrong?

• **Moral Courage.** It is one thing to define a moral issue with clarity for the public; it is quite another to uphold one's belief under intense popular pressure. Lincoln possessed both characteristics.

Indeed, he would choose war rather than surrender the core principle of the Republican Party: the containment and ultimate extinction of slavery. Lincoln's courageous response to secession stands in contrast to the craven policy of his predecessor James Buchanan, who would have allowed the South to secede to perpetuate slavery. For Lincoln, some things were worth fighting for. He did not believe in peace at any price.

Thus, at Cooper Union in New York City on February 27, 1860, Lincoln exhorted the Republican Party to stand firm.

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of



Poster from Lincoln's 1864 presidential campaign in New York.

dungeons to ourselves. LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT. [Lincoln's capitalization.]

Which of today's candidates best embodies this call to moral courage?

• **Humility.** Moral stewardship must be tempered by humility, lest it lapse into self-righteousness. The virtue of humility stands opposed to the vice of

hubris — the overreaching of all personal and political limits in the effort to transfigure human nature and society overnight, at any cost. The humble leader puts aside his or her ego in the service to a greater cause and good.

Humility guards leaders against the seductive temptations of power and against delusions of their own infallibility. This quality enables leaders to both acknowledge and grow from their mistakes.

Though he condemned slavery in the abstract, Lincoln also distinguished the sin of slavery from the sinner. His righteous indignation was reserved for the elite of

his own time whose sophistry blurred the line between good and evil, thereby persuading many well-intentioned people and followers to do the wrong thing.

Unlike some of the radical abolitionists of his time who cast the North as “children of the light” and the South as “children of darkness,” Lincoln assigned blame to both sides for the national sin of slavery. Neither side was perfectly righteous. Thus, in his *Second Inaugural*, he stated:

Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.

Which of today’s candidates combines the seemingly incompatible qualities of righteous indignation and humility?

• **Practical Wisdom.** Practical wisdom or prudence is the crucial ability to act well or rightly under the circumstances. This crucial virtue involves applying moral principle under the particular social, legal and political constraints of the time.

Practical wisdom also involves the adaptation of lawful political means to just political ends. For Lincoln, this meant the preservation of a national Union dedicated to the principles of the Declaration of Independence. He prudently recognized that the Union’s preservation was the precondition to attaining loftier goals of equality for all. A confederate victory resulting in the dissolution of the Union would have spelled doom for the cause of freedom.

To maintain a fragile coalition to defeat the Confederacy, Lincoln had to balance his commitment to the principle of universal equality with the constitutional firewall that prohibited the federal government from interfering with slavery in the border states like Maryland that remained in the Union.

Moreover, because the Emancipation

Proclamation was legally justified as a war measure, it could only apply to belligerent states. Thus, Lincoln said:

The original proclamation has no constitutional or legal justification, except as a military measure. The exemptions were made because the military necessity did not apply to the exempted localities. Nor does that necessity apply to them now any more than it did then. If I take the step must I not do so, without the argument of military necessity, and so, without any argument, except the one that I think the measure politically expedient, and morally right? Would I not thus give up all footing upon constitution or law? Would I not thus be in the boundless field of absolutism?

Lincoln’s crucial support for the 13th Amendment, which banned slavery throughout the entire Union, testified to his principled commitment to advancing equality under the circumstances through the lawful, constitutional channels. Which of today’s candidates will best apply principle under the circumstances and adapt the best means to secure just ends?

• **Integrity.** Can we trust our leaders to tell the truth? Can we rely upon them to follow through on their commitments? Is there any substance behind their carefully manicured public image? Integrity refers to what a person *is made of* at his or her inner core. Put another way, personal integrity is revealed by whether a person “lives by the lie” as the Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has observed.

Lincoln’s integrity was shown by his refusal to retract the Emancipation Proclamation in exchange for peace when it would have been politically expedient to do so. In 1864, in response to the criticisms of a war Democrat who opposed the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln rhetorically asked:

I am sure you would not desire me to say, or to leave an inference, that I am ready, whenever convenient, to join in re-enslaving those who shall have served us in consideration of

our promise. As matter of morals, could such treachery by any possibility, escape the curses of Heaven, or of any good man?

Which candidate today has an inner character that matches the outward image?

• **Fortitude.** Lincoln did not let his many life disappointments prevent him from playing his part in history. Though he suffered from melancholy — what we today would call depression — he persevered, never surrendering to despair. There were many trials and occasions in which he could have done so: after losing the Senate race to Douglas; after watching the Union dissolve before his eyes; after his son died in the White House; after his wife’s mental breakdown; after witnessing the carnage of the war; after a string of humiliating Union defeats on the battlefield; after being vilified and lampooned by the press; and after being threatened with assassination.

Lincoln was sustained through these trials by both his humor and his living faith that God was using him as a humble instrument for some greater purpose.

Thus, in reply to the prayers of a Quaker woman who came to the White House in 1862 to provide him with spiritual consolation after a string of defeats, he confessed:

We are indeed going through a great trial — a fiery trial. In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid.

Which of today’s candidates will persevere in the face of suffering and adversity? □

Joseph R. Fornieri is associate professor of political science at the Rochester Institute of Technology and author of *Abraham Lincoln’s Political Faith*.

A home for their own

State veterans' homes struggle to recruit during a nursing shortage, as demand grows for a facility in the Chicago area

by Patrick O'Brien

For 87-year-old Frances Staszewski, the Manteno Veterans' Home near Kankakee is nothing less than a lifeline and a salute to the service he gave as a member of the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II.

"Thank the State of Illinois for giving us a home. We have no place else to go. We have all we need to take care of ourselves," he says.

Staszewski says he has more freedom at the Manteno facility than he would at home, where he had limited mobility without a wheelchair.

Meanwhile, 173 more veterans have registered for a chance to stay at Manteno.

The state's veterans' homes face multiple challenges to meet the needs of a changing and growing population.

A nationwide nursing shortage is even more severe for the state's veterans' homes because all four homes are outside the Chicago area, making recruiting more difficult. Private hospitals offer incentives the state cannot, and Illinois scrambles to hire nurses as quickly as possible. That shortage, combined with an increasing number of Vietnam veterans who are nursing-home age, threatens to further strain resources.

"We admit [veterans] at our homes only when we have sufficient numbers [of nurses] to care for them," says Manteno administrator Martin Downs. The home is not in the position of having to turn away veterans, however.

Jessica Woodward, spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Veterans'

Affairs, says the average overtime for a nurse at Manteno is nine hours a month, compared with 20 hours at the LaSalle Veterans' Home in north-central Illinois.

The nurses' union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31, has a contract with the state that requires them to work overtime as needed, she adds.

Certified nursing assistants at LaSalle say they work an average of 15 mandatory overtime hours a week, and the burden affects their personal lives and makes it more difficult to care for residents.

Jessica Becket, a nursing assistant at LaSalle, said at a Statehouse press conference that she ran her car into a ditch after an exhausting 16-hour shift. Becket and Kathy Reno, who leads the local union at the home, say as many as seven employees have been terminated for refusing to work overtime shifts.

Both women stress that the overtime issue has had a far greater effect on their private lives than on the quality of care given to residents. They note that the nurses who remain at the home tend to be the most dedicated.

The LaSalle home is finishing an 80-bed expansion, which will create more demand for staffing when it's completed this summer.

Tammy Duckworth, director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, says the pool of available nurses is small in rural areas, so downstate veterans' homes have to draw from the Chicago area. But nurses don't always want to leave Chicago.

Photograph by Patrick O'Brien



Patrick O'Keefe served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War era and lives at the Manteno Veterans' Home.

"It's significantly more difficult to get them to work in LaSalle than in Chicago. We can't compete with the private hospitals that are offering \$10,000 to sign up," she says.

The department has begun offering \$5,000 in tuition reimbursement and other enticements to make it easier to recruit nurses. Duckworth says most homes hired 20 nurses or more in the past year.

Sen. John Sullivan, a Rushville Democrat, says a proposed measure to eliminate mandatory overtime for state employees could help retain nurses by allowing them to refuse double shifts and long work weeks without penalty.

Duckworth says the department will work within the confines of the proposal if



Frances Staszewski is a World War II veteran from Chicago and lives in Manteno Veterans' Home in Kankakee County.

approved. The House approved the measure in April. It was in the Senate in mid-May with 34 co-sponsors.

The shortage in nurses will soon be compounded by the increasing number of Vietnam veterans who need nursing care in Illinois.

"We're really facing a double boom with the Vietnam vets," Duckworth says. "We serve 114 of them in our homes, and that population is only going to grow. And when they enter, they could be with us for another 20 years."

According to Duckworth, the Veterans Administration in Washington, D.C., told a group of state veterans' administrators last fall that 80 percent of eligible Vietnam veterans have not yet applied for benefits at the state or federal levels.

About 3 million Americans served in Vietnam, but it's unclear how many live

in Illinois and would be eligible for such benefits.

The federal agency reports 6,955 Vietnam veterans in Illinois, a count that Duckworth says is just a fraction of the actual number. If the federal government's statistics on the number of veterans eligible for care are correct, Illinois' real population of Vietnam veterans is closer to five times that.

As those veterans reach retirement age, they often lose employer-related health care coverage, which is especially important considering the types of illnesses many of them may have.

Some of those under-the-radar veterans were exposed to Agent Orange, a defoliant used extensively by the U.S. military in its herbicidal warfare program. They are entering the age where symptoms of diseases associated with the toxin, such as cancer, leukemia,

hypertension and diabetes, become more urgent.

According to Duckworth, medical technology in Vietnam saved many lives that would have been lost in earlier wars, meaning more residents have lost limbs and suffered brain injuries and other wounds that complicate efforts to care for them.

"With the entrance of the Vietnam generation, the injuries have become worse and the disabilities worse," she says.

Veterans with dementia or Alzheimer's disease require extra levels of care that other patients don't, so staffing shortages can hit particularly hard in those units. Sullivan says the cost and effort to care for that group of patients makes staffing shortages harder to get under control.

At the Manteno home, the Alzheimer's unit must be locked down at all times.

Currently at full capacity with all 40 beds occupied, 60 people wait to be admitted to the unit. Some will wait up to two years, which is not unique to that facility.

"We need Alzheimer's beds everywhere," Duckworth says.

Woodward of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs says the state has a total of 111 beds for Alzheimer's patients, and all are filled.

Duckworth says she would like to build new Alzheimer's units because the cost of updating older homes like Quincy would be less efficient.

The Alzheimer's unit in the southern Illinois Anna Veterans' Home is the model for future units.

"I want to build a state-of-the-art facility rather than cobbling something together that has to be fixed later," Duckworth says. A proposal to build a new home in the Chicago area would include new beds for veterans with Alzheimer's.

Yet partially because of staffing issues and ongoing construction, the existing homes are not currently operating at full capacity.

The department reports that 850 veterans live in the state's five homes, with 1,232 being the maximum authorized capacity. There are 140 additional beds across the state unavailable because of remodeling.

The state's current budget for the homes allows them to be staffed at 89 percent capacity. Next year's budget request for the Quincy home, however, would decrease funding and allow it to operate at 80 percent capacity because of decreased demand.

Rep. Lisa Dugan, a Bradley Democrat and member of the House committee that oversees veterans' affairs, says that even if the state made all the money available for full occupation of all beds, it would take time to find the staff.

The waiting list at Manteno includes many veterans who were offered beds in the Quincy home but declined because they wanted to stay near Chicago. This trend is increasing, and the department says some veterans are opting for more expensive private care in the Chicago area.

Care at the state home is \$929 a month for almost every veteran, while private

nursing homes can charge four to six times that amount, Downs says.

State homes contain twice the number of beds as the federal veterans' homes in Illinois, and budget pressures on the federal system make Illinois' veterans' homes an important safety net.

Illinois has three federal veterans' homes, in Danville, Marion and North Chicago. The federal system for veterans also is strained to care for the older generation of veterans as they focus on assisting the estimated 1.7 million recent veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The veterans who rely on the homes and who care for their fellow veterans say the nursing issues, however, have not impacted the quality of care.

Woodward says the state homes meet the federal standard of 2.5 hours' staffing per day for each resident. The Manteno home employs 60 registered nurses, 90 certified nursing assistants and three full-time physicians to care for its 250 residents. The facility also transports residents daily to the federal Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital west of Chicago for medical care.

"You would be hard-pressed to find anyone to argue with the quality of care," Sullivan says. His district contains the largest veterans' home, with more than 500 residents in Quincy.

Staszewski says he receives exemplary care. "I'd rather be here than in any other place. We're treated like veterans here."

Barry Baron says the quality of care is high because the home is run by veterans.

Baron, the adjutant of the Manteno home, watches over fellow veterans who served in the same war he did and considers himself lucky to be able to do so. He served in the 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970.

He assists Downs in helping residents make the transition to being away from their own homes. He says he's continuing a tradition. "When we were overseas, we took care of ourselves and each other, and that continues."

Baron, himself in a wheelchair because of wounds he suffered in the war, says helping fellow veterans transition to the home has done wonders for him.

"I'm fortunate to have the opportunity to work there. It's probably extended my life, to be able to help people."

Downs says the home has about 20

volunteers a day, including some veterans, who assist the staff and provide companionship and support for residents.

Downs, also an Army veteran, says the common bonds between residents make the home less gloomy. "You don't get a sense of finality here, but a sense of camaraderie."

And the woman who oversees the operation of all the homes, Duckworth, is an Iraq War veteran who lost both legs after her helicopter was shot down in 2004.

Although Duckworth says the system is operating within its current constraints, building a new home in the Chicago area is crucial to meeting current and future needs.

Woodward says roughly 50 percent of the state's veterans live in Cook and the surrounding counties, but the closest homes, in Manteno and LaSalle, are more than an hour's drive from Chicago.

The department says a Chicago-area home will provide easier access for veterans' families using the extensive public transportation system in Cook County. The department also says the high cost of private nursing home care in Cook County means veterans need another option for care in the area.

"It's not just capacity, it's where the capacity is at. It's very difficult to visit a loved one," Duckworth says.

The plan to build a home in the Chicago area, however, depends on funding from a statewide construction plan being negotiated in Springfield.

Duckworth says the potential capital plan would earmark \$15 million for the project, and if approved, Illinois would move up in line for a federal matching grant. The federal match would provide 65 percent of the project's funding, with the state providing the remainder.

Even with the challenges in staffing the homes and a looming influx of more residents, the homes continue to serve veterans in a unique way.

Baron says the Manteno home is a place where veterans can be comfortable knowing they're with others who know their struggles. "We're all in the same fraternity. Some of the things they've shared in their lives they can only share with other veterans." □

UIS grad tells Chinese history from a multicultural perspective

Wen Huang's idea of democracy has completely changed since he transitioned from working as a journalist for a government-owned newspaper in China to working as a journalism student in Illinois' Capitol. He's now a journalist and author living in Chicago.

Nineteen years ago this month, Huang participated in a student movement in Beijing to urge reform of Communist China. The government's army, however, shot protesters, many of whom were students on a hunger strike, in what's called the Tiananmen Square massacre.

In retrospect, Huang refers to the movement as a contagious wave of passionate students who really didn't know what democracy meant. But a year after the massacre, Huang moved to the United States to learn about American-style government, thanks to a friendship formed with Robert Crowley, professor emeritus of human development counseling for the University of Illinois at Springfield.

They met in China, and Crowley introduced Huang to the university's Public Affairs Reporting master's degree program.

Huang credits his time in the Illinois Capitol with giving him the foundation for writing objective stories from a variety of perspectives, something he later used when reporting for the *New York Times* and something he still uses in his most recent work translating a Chinese book.

"When I first came over here, I just thought, 'The state government in China would never have this process.' It was so interesting to see the democratic process working. I just thought all state laws were supposed to be about the big, lofty stuff."

But some of his first student assignments for *Illinois Issues* included writing about reducing soil erosion and requiring fingerprints for school bus drivers.

"I was just so amazed how the laws actually affect the day-to-day life," he says.

Crowley, who sponsored Huang's trip to Springfield and still keeps in touch with him, describes Huang as "an excellent

writer" who also loves opera and literature. "He's very well informed about American culture. He also has a way of relating to people."

Huang's passion for sharing different perspectives of culture and history is evident in his most recent work, a translation of *The Corpse Walker*, a collection of interviews that demonstrate how China's political transitions affected ordinary citizens. Such stories from a blind street musician, a public restroom manager, a Feng Shui master and a former Red Guard, the name given to young activists in 1960s China, are considered bold in a government that censored negative history.

Huang describes the author of *The Corpse Walker*, Liao Yiwu, as the Chinese version of Studs Terkel, a Chicago author and radio personality who also told oral history through a collection of interviews. Just as China continues to learn from American-style democracy, he says, Americans can learn from the history of China.

"For Americans, on the one side, you see these horrible political campaigns that had a devastating impact on the lives of other people. On the other side, you see these incredible survival skills by these people, the stamina and the flexibility that these people displayed in their ordinary lives."

Huang adds that China continues to progress but still struggles to shed a perception of intolerance after such controversies as those leading up to this summer's Olympic Games, which highlighted China's tense relationship with Tibet.

"It's the paradoxical situation that people have to understand, but I have to say that during the past 18 years I studied here, there is a lot of progress. But there is still a long way to go."

Huang says he already knows the first lines of his acceptance speech if, one day, he fulfills his dream of winning the top journalistic honor, a Pulitzer Prize. "One of the top lines I'm going to say is Springfield, the PAR program and the internship and the mentors that helped," starting with Mary Bohlen, Bill Miller and Mike Klemens.

Bohlen, associate professor of communication and chair of the UIS Communications Department, also was an assistant professor for the Public Affairs Reporting program during Huang's internship.

"Everyone respected him," she says. "I respected his integrity and his ability. He really is a joy to be around."

The late Bill Miller served as director of the master's program at then-Sangamon State University for 19 years.

Klemens, Huang's Statehouse bureau chief at the magazine, is now with the Illinois Department of Revenue but says working with Huang was memorable.

"I learned as much from him as he learned from me," Klemens says, noting an appreciation of life beyond the narrow U.S. boundaries. "We have all these simplistic notions of the way the world works, which you learn from Wen is much more complex."

Huang says Springfield has become a second home. "I never left Illinois."

Bethany Jaeger



Wen Huang

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OBIT

Larry McKeon

The first openly gay legislator, who retired from the Illinois House in 2006 after 10 years, died May 13. He was 63.

The Democrat represented northern Chicago neighborhoods, but Rep. Gregory Harris, who replaced McKeon in 2006, says his work resonated statewide. "I think a lot of people expected him to come down here and sort of be a single-note guy. He proved that he had the ability to represent the City of Chicago, he had the ability to represent the people of his district, he had a strong voice for people who were dispossessed and underserved all across this state — and really distinguish himself as a leader on a lot of key issues."

McKeon worked to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and secured state funding for services for people with HIV and AIDS, but he also advocated for such issues as housing, mental health and developmental disabilities.

"He never shied away from confronting tough issues or seeking to bring disparate forces together," said House Speaker Michael Madigan in a statement. "I admired his tenacity and his intellect."

Born in Idaho, McKeon's 42 years of public service included working as a special adviser to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, a lieutenant in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and an infantry officer in the U.S. Army.

Former prison expert is acquitted

Michael Mahoney, a prison consultant and former director of a prison watchdog group, was acquitted on federal charges of an alleged kickback scheme (see *Illinois Issues*, November 2007, page 35).

U.S. District Judge James Zagel ruled that the prosecution failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Mahoney was part of a scheme that allegedly involved paying cash to **Donald Snyder Jr.**, former director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, to secure state contracts for Mahoney's

clients who sought to provide health care services for the prison system.

"I think it was a terrible case in the first instance," says Thomas Durkin, Mahoney's defense lawyer. "We had argued that it shouldn't have been brought. The government chose to go ahead on it in any event."

Two lobbyists for the health care companies, **John Robinson** of Barrington Hills and **Larry Sims** of Pleasant Plains, pleaded guilty last August to participating in the scheme. They, along with Snyder, await their sentences.

Mahoney worked for the John Howard Association of Illinois, a Chicago-based nonprofit group that fought overcrowding in Cook County Jail, for 27 years. He retired in 2002. The association was not involved in the case.

Shifts at the top

Senate Majority Leader **Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson**, a Crete Democrat, lost her seat on the powerful Senate Rules Committee last month and was replaced by Assistant Majority Leader **Rickey Hendon**, a Chicago Democrat. The Rules Committee controls which pieces of legislation advance to floor debate.

Halvorson says she was surprised but that the move by Senate President Emil Jones Jr. would allow her to focus on serving as majority leader.

"The Senate president felt that it was a distraction because every little thing was taken out of context, put into somebody else's context, and was keeping us from doing what was important."

Halvorson received criticism for holding in the Rules Committee a constitutional amendment that would allow voters to decide whether to recall elected officials. A broader measure eventually failed on the Senate floor. Halvorson also was criticized for preventing a highly anticipated ethics reform proposal from advancing. The measure, which would ban state contractors from donating to the officeholders who grant the contracts, was awaiting Senate debate as this issue went to press.

"It's no secret that I was for the recall. I was for the pay-to-play legislation. I'm anti-pay raise," she says. "I think I was causing a few too many problems."

Halvorson faces Republican **Martin Ozinga**, president of a concrete and construction firm, and Green Party candidate **Jason Wallace** to replace Republican U.S. Rep. Jerry Weller in the congressional district southwest of Chicago.

Federal investigations

Ali Ata, former executive director of the Illinois Finance Authority, pleaded guilty to lying to federal investigators and falsifying his federal income tax return. The federal probe relates to the case called "Operation Board Games," involving **Antoin "Tony" Rezko's** alleged influence in state business and campaign fundraising.

Ata's plea agreement indicates Rezko was instrumental in hiring Ata as executive director of the Illinois Finance Authority in exchange for his hefty contributions to Gov. **Rod Blagojevich's** political campaign. The Finance Authority is a state agency formed in 2004. It funds about \$3 billion in projects for economic development each year.

The plea agreement said Ata met in 2000 or 2001 with Rezko and "Public Official A," who has been widely identified as Blagojevich. Before he was elected governor, they allegedly talked about supporting his campaign. They later talked about receiving a state position in return.

Donations came in chunks as large as \$25,000, according to Illinois State Board of Elections records.

The plea agreement says Ata believed that to keep his job, he needed to please Rezko. That involved giving about \$125,000 to Rezko between 2003 and 2004, at the same time he led the state agency.

Ata faces up to eight years in federal prison and up to \$500,000 in fines. He's cooperating with federal authorities.

Blagojevich has not been charged with wrongdoing.

Long-term care for seniors

In response to Mary Massingale's recent article "Community is key" (see *Illinois Issues*, April, page 26), several issues regarding Illinois' long-term care for seniors need to be amplified.

The Illinois Department on Aging's Community Care Program (CCP) assists seniors to live independently in their homes and saves the state millions of dollars each year. One of the CCP's problems is that a senior with the highest level of disability can receive only about 20 hours of assistance per week and usually not on the weekends. The program that serves people with disabilities under the age of 60, the Home Services Program, can provide to a person with a comparable level of disability up to 10 hours per day, seven days a week. This disparity in available services causes many seniors to prematurely enter nursing homes, at a much higher cost to the taxpayers. By increasing the funding and range of services in the CCP, more money will be

saved because home and community-based services (as quoted in the article, \$38,780 for nursing homes/\$17,176 for community) are more cost-effective.

Illinois continually ranks between 47th and 50th among the states in the amount it spends on community-based long-term care. We spend 73 percent of our Medicaid dollars to keep people in nursing homes and other institutions and only 27 percent to support people in their own homes. People deserve a real choice of where to receive these services and an overwhelming majority — 83 percent of Illinois AARP members — would prefer to stay at home.

Finally, in 1999 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Olmstead decision that unjustified institutionalization of a person with a disability was a violation of civil rights. Nearly nine years later, Illinois still doesn't give people the choice they want and deserve and continues to deny the civil rights of its most vulnerable citizens.

*Mark Karner
Forest Park*



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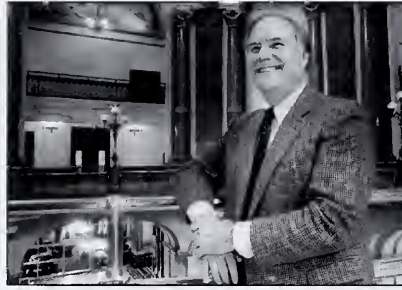
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Charles N. Wheeler III



Report on children offers Illinois a ray of sunshine

by Charles N. Wheeler III

Is the glass half full or half empty? In Illinois these days, the optimist might be tempted to say that while the glass is still half full, it's also leaking its noisome contents through that crack down its side.

The state's governor is up to his hairdo in allegations of illegal pay-to play politics and endemic hiring fraud. Legislative leaders seem more estranged than warring factions in the Mideast. The state can't pay its health care bills on time for lack of cash, and adding insult to injury, takes months to tell providers why they're being stiffed. The state's infrastructure crumbles while millions of dollars of federal highway aid remain untapped. Uprooting more than 100 state jobs from the capital city and shipping them to southern Illinois is touted as economic development.

And almost three out of every four Illinois voters (71 percent) think the state is on the wrong track, and a plurality, 45 percent, want Gov. Rod Blagojevich booted out of office, compared with 35 percent opposed and 18 percent undecided, according to a recent survey.

Against this sorry backdrop, the latest Illinois Kids Count report offers a welcome ray of sunshine. Its spirit-lifting conclusion: Illinois has made significant advancements in the health and well-being of its youngest citizens, so that children today are much better off than their counterparts a generation ago.

For all the progress, much remains to be done, the report notes. Unemployment and poverty rates are increasing in Illinois, the proportion of children without health insurance remains the highest in the Midwest, despite enactment of the All Kids program, and mental health services for children are woefully inadequate.

Prepared by Voices for Illinois Children, a leading children's advocacy group, the 2008 edition of the annual report measures changes in five key areas, including health and development, education, family economic security, children and youth at risk and demographics.

"Children's well-being has improved significantly on virtually every measure" over the last 20 years, says Jerry Stermer, Voices president. "This compares with a generation ago when research showed that Illinois kids ranked in the bottom 20 percent of virtually every national study of health, development, economic security and state funding for children."

Stermer cites three areas in particular in which the state has made great strides:

- The dramatic drop in the number of children coming into state care, to roughly 17,000 at present compared with a record high of more than 50,000 a decade ago, the highest in the nation based on population.

The decline was achieved largely through reforms designed to encourage adoption and provide subsidized guardianships, often with a child's extended family.

"Kids by all estimates are better off in more stable situations," says Stermer, who credits cooperation among state government, private child welfare groups, schools, community agencies and the court system for the gains.

- Expansion of early childhood education so that some 90,000 youngsters are now enrolled in public preschool programs, 12 times as many as were enrolled 20 years ago. Moreover, two years ago, Illinois became the first state to offer preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds.

The decision to increase preschool opportunities reflected an awareness that "success in the education experience for kids even more profoundly depends on what happens in their first five years than we ever realized before," Stermer says.

- Widespread availability of subsidized child care for parents leaving welfare for the workforce, which has resulted in

some 200,000 children being served, more than double the number in 1997, shortly after federal welfare reform was enacted.

State legislators and policymakers understood that for welfare reform to work, basics such as child care assistance were needed, Stermer says. "We did not walk away as families moved from welfare to work."

For all the progress, much remains to be done, the report notes. Unemployment and poverty rates are increasing in Illinois, the proportion of children without health insurance remains the highest in the Midwest, despite enactment of the All Kids program, and mental health services for children are woefully inadequate.

Moreover, huge funding disparities persist among public school districts, largely because the state relies too heavily on local property taxes to finance education.

Stermer would add another, perhaps surprising, category to the to-do list for improving children's future well-

being: enactment of a public works program.

Tucked away in the current pending legislation is a \$30 million allocation for construction of early childhood education facilities to address the "profound mismatch" between where kids live and where preschool programs are offered. The need is greatest in suburban Chicago, he says, where an ongoing influx of Hispanic families has outstripped available preschool spots.

In addition, other construction projects aimed at reducing traffic congestion and improving mass transit would reduce the time wasted in rush hour jams or CTA "slow zones" which "takes directly away from real crucial family time between kids and their parents," Stermer says.

Given such ongoing needs, can the gains in children's welfare of the last two decades be built upon in the current corrosive atmosphere permeating the Statehouse? After all, most of the programs the *Kids Count 2008* report credits were fashioned when governors

and legislative leaders were on much better terms than they are in today's combat zone environment.

The current dynamics pose an obstacle, Stermer concedes. "We have to have the leadership to take us to the next level. We can't do what needs to be done for kids and their families if the stalemate continues."

But, he adds: "We can't give up and abandon our hopes in the future because we're stuck in a very bad place now. ... Despite the political pitfalls, we ought to believe in a better future and invest in it and not be so paralyzed by political gridlock."

The report documents that "we have some experience of making good choices," he adds. "Now we've got harder ones to make, but I'm confident that Illinois citizens will make the case that the next generation is worth it."

Clearly, a man for whom the glass is almost overflowing. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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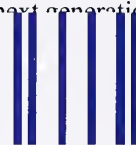
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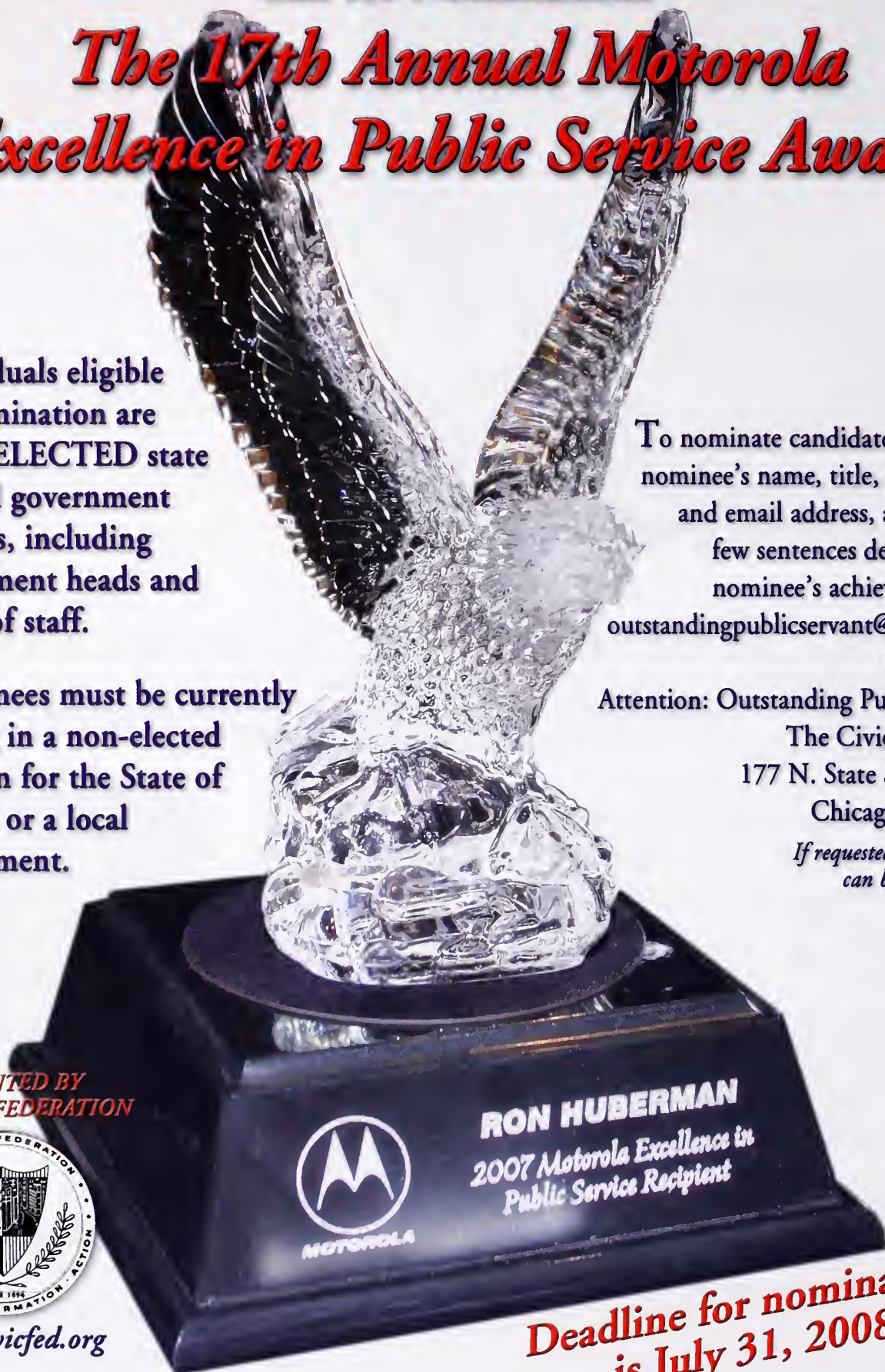
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